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THE PAINTER

by
MICHAEL ZUROY

It worked for a long time. All Anton had to do was tell himself not to kill anybody . . .

EACH NEW MORNING, Anton Druller whispered to himself a certain sentence, which was also a resolution, and the wonderful part of it was that it worked. I will not kill anybody to-day, Anton told himself, and he did not that day, and in this manner twenty years had passed, day by day, during which he had killed no one, not even one person.

Of late years, he had begun to feel that this morning ritual could perhaps be skipped, since he had grown into the habit of not killing, but still he never skipped it. He did not want to take any chances, although he was sure that he could trust himself now.

It had been difficult at first, of course; so many temptations, so many opportunities, and his need had been so great; but except for the passionate moments of his need, he did not really want to kill; he wanted, rather, to remain gentle and kind. He shuddered when he recalled the terrible wrongs he had done to other human beings.

The little store in which he conducted his sign painting business was on West Thirty-Seventh Street. This morning, as always, Anton hung his jacket up neatly in a corner, got into a paint-streaked, greenish smock, and stepped outside his doorway for the morning air and the sight of the people and traffic increasing in the street. He scanned the tall buildings between which the street seemed an insignificant fissure; dirty gray monsters, he thought, sucking people up from the ground through the

veins of your elevator shafts to feed your insatiable cells; mud-colored atrocities; materialized ugliness.

Two or three old tenements squatted among these buildings, with Manhattan illogic, and from them school children and workbound adults were trickling.

Watching one of the children approaching, a blonde girl, Anton's eyes squinted behind his round glasses and a ripple of appreciation moved across his lean, mosquitoe-like face. How lovely the sun on her golden hair, he thought, lovely shining, lovely glints, lovely tawny shade. The subtle coloring of the skin. His eyes clung to her, turning liquid within their slitted lids when she stopped and smiled at him.

I shall not kill her, he reassured himself. No, no, I shall never kill her. I have no intention of killing her.

He put out his thin hand and touched her hair. He stared at the contrast: his wrist, flat white, with wiry black hairs that grew to his knuckles, against the soft gold. He slid his hand lightly down to her neck. Incredible velvet! He gave her a penny, saying, "Now, remember, this is our secret. You shall have one whenever you stop a moment with me in the morning."

"Sure, Mr. Druller." She snatched the coin and ran off.

He sighed and reentered the store. Now, he thought, let us see what's to be done. Six signs to be completed today, eight on hand, to be delivered. One by one, he propped up the completed signs and examined them critically and minutely. Fine, fine, he thought, but again the feeling that I should do better, that I have missed perfection; this must be the burden of all artists. Should not that blue be a tone lighter, a wave length lighter? He shook his head and began shuffling through the day's orders.

The biggest one was the Packer order, but the Packer account was long overdue; Mr. Packer owed for several signs. In fact, Anton realized, he hadn't paid for anything yet. Firmly, he turned over the order sheet. The Packer sign would have to wait until he had some slack time. He began working on another order.

His helper came in. Anton instructed him on some of the deliveries and watched him go off, signs in his arms, spare legs swivelling inside the slate gray trousers. A study in slate gray, thought Anton. Slate gray in motion. I could spend a lifetime on mobile slate gray; I could write a book on that alone. Remarkable how much there is to learn about the elementary.

Anton's mind went to the boy. He is perfectly safe with me, he assured himself again. Perfectly safe. He could work for me another ten years, twenty years, and I wouldn't kill him. I wish I could tell him how safe he is here.

Anton applied himself to his work, humming. He sketched and lettered rapidly but with precision. He spent the most time over mixing his colors, using scores of small jars to graduate his tints and evolve new ones. Most important, he thought, to choose a shade of color suitable to the message, since shades of feeling were innumerable too; so, and with proper harmony and proportion a sign could be a work of art and effectively do its job at the same time.

The phone rang and, with the impatience with the interruption that he had never learned to overcome, he left his workbench and answered it. It was Mr. Packer. Mr. Packer wanted his sign this morning. Politely, Anton explained that he couldn't promise it for two or three days; longer, perhaps; he was rushed with work. Mr. Packer demanded that he get on his sign at once. Anton suggested that he might try another sign-painter; perhaps one who did not care whether or not his bills were paid.

"Damn it, none of your lip there," Mr. Packer exploded. "You've had that order long enough. You know damn well I can't get another sign-painter to start it right away. I got buyers coming in to-day and I need that sign for my sample room, for my display. How do you expect me to sell leather goods without a classy display? Finish it up, and I'll send you a check for the whole balance first thing in the morning. How's that?"

"I'm sorry," said Anton.

"Look, buster," barked Mr. Packer, "I'm coming right over there, and you're going to finish it if I have to stand over you and watch. You'll get your stinking money, if that's what you're worried about."

Anton hung up.

An extremely unpleasant character, he thought, returning to his workbench. That voice; it was the type of a voice that was loud, without yelling; it just came out loud no matter what Packer was saying, and when he yelled it was unbearable. An unfortunate affliction.

Anton worked on. After a while, a short man came and stood in front of his window, examining the neat arrangement of signs. Come on, come in, thought Anton cheerily. Always glad to welcome a potential customer. You will be in no danger at all; I am harmless. This little store would be a fine place for a murder, of course, unfrequented, quiet in the midst of the street clamor, with a little back room where a body could be hidden indefinitely, until disposed of; but have no fear, I do not seriously think of these things any more..

The man came in. He peered at Anton doubtfully. He needed a sign, although he was not very sure as to its composition. Fine, fine, said Anton. This was the type of business he enjoyed, where he could instruct and direct. It turned into a long discussion, with Anton advising, suggesting, explaining, convincing. He demonstrated the importance of the proper color tone. "This green, for example, notice how dull and dingy it appears. How does it make you feel? Weary and lethargic, am I right? But

watch! A touch of lemon yellow, a drop of rose, and see how it livens up, it makes you feel light, buoyant, don't you agree?"

"Why, yes," nodded the little man, "I get what you mean all right. Say, that's something, isn't it? Say, that's a beautiful shade of green, beautiful. You know your stuff all right. O.K., let's settle a couple more details and you can go ahead."

Mr. Packer walked in. He planted his thick-set body in front of Anton and said, "Here I am, buster. Let's get going with that sign."

"If you please," said Anton coldly, "I am talking to this gentleman."

"I was ahead of him. You're not supposed to be talking, you're supposed to be working on my order."

"I don't want to cause any trouble," said the little man nervously. "I can wait."

"I assure you there's no need to wait," said Anton.

"Come on, come on, let's get going," bellowed Mr. Packer. "The hell with this guy. Let's see some action.

"I better go," said the customer. "I'll be back some other time."

"But I assure you . . ."

"Be back." The little man ducked out.

"Good," said Mr. Packer. "Now you can get started."

Anton stared fixedly at Mr. Packer. I had better not fight with him, he thought. It's not good for me to fight. He would be in no danger, of course; I will not kill him. I am resolved not to kill him. Anton indicated the job on his workbench. "You see I'm working on another order."

Mr. Packer brushed the incompleted sign roughly aside. "That takes care of that excuse. Let's go."

Insufferable boor, thought Anton. If I must finish his sign to get rid of him, I had better do it. Without a word, he went to his bench and began the job.

"All right," said Packer. "All right. That's better."

He took a chair and whistled through his teeth while Anton worked. He rose again and walked around the store, his heavy feet clumping back and forth behind Anton. He stood over Anton's shoulder and watched, his noisy breath whispering down to Anton's nostrils, strong with the rich food of many years. "Hurry it up, will you," he said, watching Anton's methodical strokes.

He resumed pacing. "Jeez," he burst out irritably after a while, "how do you stand this place? What a hole. I guess you got to be a certain type to stand this place. Jeez."

When another customer started to enter, he strode over roaring, "Sorry, buddy, we're all tied up now. Come back some other time."

He alternated from the chair to pacing the floor to watching over Anton's shoulder until Anton found himself listening for the creak of the chair and the footsteps and the whispering breath.

He brushed the workbench once and knocked off a jar of paint. It shattered on the floor, leaving a ragged yellowish pool. "Hell," he said. "Had that too close to the edge, didn't you, Druller? Well, I guess there's no harm done, it's only paint."

Anton went on working silently. Wonderful, he thought, how steadfast my resolution remains. I am positive that I will not kill him. There remains now the mixing of the colors and the painting and I will be through and rid of him.

Packer came and watched, went away, came and watched again. "What's going on," he roared, "stop dragging your tail, will you? Slap it on."

Anton went on mixing.

"What kind of tripe is this?" said Packer.

Anton went on mixing. The blue was about right. He began stroking it on the sign. It was a lovely shade, a beautiful shade, and he stroked it on caressingly.

"Holy cow," said Packer, "what kind of a foul color are you putting on my sign?"

Anton looked up through his round glasses. "This is an exquisite tint, Mr. Packer."

"Exquisite, hell. I want a royal blue, something you can see, like in that jar over there." He grabbed a brush, jabbed it into the jar, looked around for a surface, and painted a wide streak across the incompleted sign that Anton had been working on. "Like that."

Anton got up. The job he just spoiled, he thought, I will ignore that. But he must understand about the color. He must not say those things about my colors. Anton began to explain.

Anton's eyes slitted, staring at Packer. It's true, he thought, this man has no appreciation of color and beauty; he spits upon color and beauty; he spits upon my work. Look at him; look at how he dresses, even; his very appearance is an insult.

This man deserves to die.

Knowing this, he began to tremble with ecstasy. The barrier was down; he could let himself go after all those long years. His breath came rapidly; the waves of passion began surging through him; there was no return any more, the wild need was upon him; there was no return any more, the wild need was upon him. His thin, groping hand picked up a small sharp knife, that he used for cutting pasteboard. Shaking, he waited the smallest part of a second for the spasm, then whirled, his arm swinging wide, and the knife slashed through Packer's throat.

For long moments he just watched the blood. Beautiful, he thought, beautiful. It spurted, it gushed, it gurgled. His hand, as though of its own volition, selected a paint brush, and he bent forward, dipping. The color of human blood was the most beautiful color of all.

Arne would be a rich man now—if he hadn't been so dumb about his new wife. . . .

a real quiet guy

by TOM PHILLIPS

I HAVE NO IDEA what stone-cutters pull down nowadays, but back in '48, when all this happened, they were getting fifteen cents a foot. Figure that out. An old-timer, knocking out 150, 200 feet, averaged $25, $30 a day. Even apprentices got $15, and back then, with laborers going at 75 cents an hour, that was fabulous dough. Today their paychecks must come by the pound.

Arne'd really be in the chips now if he was still in circulation. But when I knew him he was just an apprentice, learning to cut on the G.I. Bill. We worked for Sig Vanetti at the White Rose Quarry, a big hole in a hill located five miles out of Cranbrook. I was a truck-jockey; that's how I got to know Arne so good. I loaded stone out of his section mostly, and once in awhile I'd get him talking. Which was quite a trick, 'cause Arne was a real quiet guy.

Most of the time when you tried to get the big boy going, he'd listen carefully, maybe grunt once or twice, and that was it. Try to pin him down, and he'd shoot you that blank smile of his and shrug. Later, when I finally got inside of him, I found Arne was a little on the slow side, and awfully shy.

But nice? They don't come nicer.

He'd quit school at 16, served his stretch in the army, finally drifted into quarry work. Though he never said it, I got the idea he'd got the raw end of things at home. But when he talked about Carol, his wife, he'd smile, and his eyes would light up like a small boy's on Christmas morning. To him she made up for all the things in his life which hadn't turned out just right.

Trouble was, Carol was nothing but a cheap tramp, and everybody knew it. Everybody, that is, except Arne, and he was too dumb to see it. He'd met her at Broadmeadows, which was a crummy bar with a fancy name located a mile out of town where most of the quarry hands hung out. She'd been anybody's playmate for as long as I could remember, even though she was only around 22 years old.

Arne was a bear for wine—muscatel and port—and every night he'd drop in with us, have his usual two, three—sometimes four—glasses. Even when he had a glow on, you couldn't get much out of him. He'd just sit smiling with that empty look on his face. Then one night Carol waltzed over and sat down beside us. "Who's y'r quiet friend?" she asked me.

"None of your damn business," I said, trying to brush her.

"Now, Benny," she mocked. She was plastered to the eyes. "Is that any way to act?"

"Lay off, Carol."

"Drop dead." She turned to Arne. "Hey, mumbles—what's y'r name?"

Arne looked up from his wine, flustered. "Who, me?"

"Yes, you. You got a name haven't you?"

"Yaah, sure," Arne drawled. "Arne. Arne Nelson, I guess."

"You guess? Aren't you sure, dummy?"

"Hey, Garvey," I yelled down the bar to Carol's current steady, "you better come get this broad of yours before I knock her on her fanny!"

"Tha . . . that's all right, Benny," Arne said. "Leave her alone. She's just being friendly. She makes me laugh . . ."

Carol blew up. "I make *you* laugh?" she boiled. "God, now I've heard everything. Why, you sawed off . . ." Then Garvey came up and pulled her away, and not one second too soon. "Didya' hear what that dummy . . . ?" Carol yelled just before Garvey gave her a good clout on the mouth.

After that it became sort of a joke around the quarry—Arne and Carol. Everyone kidded him about his girlfriend, and Arne smiled good-naturedly, and as usual, said nothing. At Broadmeadows Carol went along with the gag and began hanging on him, pretending he was her big flame—all kinds of stuff like that. Talk about pitiful. You should have seen poor Arne trying to trade wise-cracks with her. She treated him something awful, and Arne just took it. Sat there smiling and smiling—

I didn't like it one bit. I could see someone was going to get hurt, and it wasn't going to be Carol. And Arne'd already been hurt enough. I told him repeatedly that Carol was making a sucker of him, but he'd just get sullen. "Don't talk—don't talk," he'd say. I tried protecting him all I could, but after awhile I gave up. I could tell by the look in his eyes—the dope was gone, but good, on Carol.

Then one morning about a month later Arne came to work wearing a smile a yard wide, and told me that he and Carol had been married the night before. A three minute special in Illinois. It seemed like someone had suddenly thrown me into the crusher. That's how sorry I felt for the poor guy. Hate? I would've killed Carol if she'd been there then.

It wasn't hard to figure what had happened. She hadn't married Arne for his good looks, that was certain. The sad mutt was four inches shorter than Carol and ten years older. She'd got herself caught and needed a fall guy. Arne was made to order.

In a way you couldn't really blame Arne for being so blind. Here he was, 33 years old, never having anyone to care about or have care for him, and then all of a sudden—Carol. She wasn't a dog by any means, even with all the mileage she carried. She was a tall, kinda scrawny girl, but built solid at points of stress. Her features were pretty enough, and her flowing blonde hair, falling around her face, made her look almost beautiful. Maybe if my brains were as scrambled as Arne's and I'd had all that sex pushed in *my* face, I'd have made the same mistake.

None of us expected the marriage to change Carol any, nor were we disappointed. It was a well known fact that she didn't suffer for company during the days Arne was at work. Of course when she got all out of shape, and her time was near, she laid off. But a month after the baby was born it was open house all over again.

We all hated her more than ever. That may be strange in a bunch of world-wise, hardened men, but that's just an indication of how we felt about Arne. Whenever she needed the car for the day, she'd drive Arne out, and under any possible pretext, get out, and parade around the quarry's edge, dressed either in shorts or in a tight summer dress which showed her breasts and waggling buttocks off to best advantage. The guys turned their backs on her, or if Arne wasn't around to see, spat. After a few such treatments, she gave up. Even Garvey, whose baby she'd very likely carried, wouldn't speak to her.

On one of those days before she finally gave up exhibiting herself, she caught me at their car. She'd laid the baby, a golden-haired boy, on the front seat, and he was laying there, looking around and gurgling to himself. I was playing with him when she came up.

"Cute kid," I said tersely, embarrassed.

"Think so?" she said, smiling invitingly and pushing her breasts at me. "Arne and I think he's nice."

"Nice? Is that the best you can do?" I felt my anger rising. "Level with me once, Carol. Is this . . ." I pointed at the smiling child. "Is this Arne's?"

She sent me an ugly, smug grin. "What do you think?"

"Is that the only reason you married Arne?"

"You don't think I married the jerk for his charm, do you?" She got into the car, pushed the baby over roughly, arranged herself on the seat, her skirt high above her knees. "Besides," she smirked, "it cuts down on the overhead." With that she gunned the motor and shot down the drive onto the highway.

I stood motionless, watching the car get smaller, my face white, my throat choked with rage and hate.

I don't know why we were concerned over the way things were going with Arne; he certainly wasn't. Blissfully unaware of the overtime his wife was putting in, he seemed happier than ever before. He carried a thick pack of pictures of Carol and the kid in his sweat-stained shirt pocket, and no matter how many times you'd seen them, you had to look again. He was like a boastful kid, so proud of his family. I started avoiding Arne, because every time he started in on how wonderful Carol was, how much he loved her, I'd get a thick feeling in my throat and see red. I knew it was all going to blow up in his face before long.

I remember one night I was out doing the town, I met this creep in a bar, and we started drinking together. You know the kind—dark-haired, with a thin mustache—a real smooth talking cookie. Come to find out later he was an itinerant car salesman, married, with his wife and two kids living upstate. We talked baseball, fishing, even told a few off-color jokes. It was around midnight, as we finished off our sixth or seventh beer, that he mentioned Carol.

"Got a blonde on the string here. Pretty fair looker, and brother! Talk about wild! Wow!" I got a sick, angry feeling in my stomach right away. I knew who he was talking about. "She's married to a dummy who hasn't the slightest idea of how the wind blows. And she ain't one bit particular. When I told Carol . . . that's her name . . . I was moving on, she asked if I had a friend. How about it? Interested in taking seconds?"

I slid off my stool. "Do me a favor, Chuck?"

"Yeah," he said drunkenly, "what is it?"

"Stand up once?"

"Sure." He pulled himself to his feet. "Why?"

I turned swiftly on the ball of my foot, putting my full weight into the blow. There was a squashing smash you could've heard in the men's room as I connected with his mouth, and sent him slamming to the floor. He lay there amid the cigarette butts and peanut wrappers, shaking his head groggily. "Hey, Benny . . ." he bubbled through broken teeth. "What's the big idea?"

"That tramp you're sleeping with. Just happens to be my friend's wife." Then I turned and strode out.

Several days later, I stopped at Arne's table and shot the breeze with him for a few minutes. We were discussing the new clinic he was cutting for, when all of a sudden, just like he usually did, Arne changed the subject. "Say, Benny," he said in that slow way of his. "When you gonna' take the step . . . get married? It's the only way to live. Why since Carol and I . . ."

Things began boiling inside of me right away. *Arne—you poor dumb bastard*—I thought. *When you gonna' wise up?* "Me married? Hell . . . never happen."

"Honest, Ben, you don't know how happy you'll . . ."

"Christ, Arne!" I choked, turning away. "Cut it out! When you know something about women, then come around. Otherwise, shut up!" I started for the truck.

Arne stood there with a puzzled look on his face. "What do you mean, Ben? What're you getting at?"

"Your wife, you damn fool. She's no good. How long's it gonna' take you to find out?"

"Carol?" he laughed self-consciously. "You don't mean Carol, do you?"

That bewildered, innocent, little-boy voice irritated hell out of me. "Yes, Carol!" I said. "She's givin' it away. She's nothing but a tramp."

Arne was a madman. He charged the truck with a wild, maniacal light in his eyes, and before I could close the door, he'd dragged me from the cab. I never even got my hands up. It felt like he'd hit me with three feet of stone. "Take it back! You can't say those things about my Carol. She's a good wife!" He was just about to bring one of his finishing hammers down on my skull when some of the other cutters pulled him off. It took four of them to hold him until he calmed down.

He writhed wildly when I put my hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Arne," I said, the red heat gone from my brain. "I had no right to say that. Carol's okay. I must've been jealous, that's all. Sorry." As I got into my truck and drove off, I heard Arne muttering incoherently, "Jealous of me, that's what you are . . . jealous . . ."

Shortly after our fight Hank Schmitt quit and Vanetti hired a new guy to drive his truck. Matt Carter was his name and he was a wise-acre kid. Even though he was only twenty-three, there wasn't anything he didn't know about trucks. Anyway, that't what he thought.

He didn't hit it off too well with any of the old gang. For two reasons: First off Vanetti took to Matt in a big way. If the kid was obnoxious to the

rest of us, he sure knew how to get around the boss. Sometimes, watching him butter up Vanetti, snowing him, asking his opinions on everything from baseball to politics, it would be enough to turn your stomach. He sure knew how to handle Sig.

Little by little I found myself being eased out of the best jobs; the long, cushy runs were going to Matt, while I got the short deliveries, mostly local stuff. All bull work. Several times he even asked Vanetti for my new International. You know how that turned out. You don't send the beat up trucks on long hauls.

Another thing. He got onto Carol in a big hurry. Though she'd all but given up on us guys, she still came out on rare occasions. One of those times Matt saw her, she saw him, and they were in business. Matt knew the story, and it wasn't long before he was taking quite a few afternoons off to see the doctor, attend funerals and stuff like that. Of course Sig Vanetti couldn't see what Carter was pulling. That's how buffaloed he was. The rest of us kept our traps shut, just waiting, each of us hating Carter all the more.

A month later everything blew sky-high. About one o'clock on that fateful Thursday afternoon, Arne had an accident. A pile of stone he'd stacked on his table somehow tipped and cut his left hand pretty bad. Old man Vanetti bandaged him up the best he could, then sent him into town to the doc's. As he watched Arne slowly drive off, Vanetti, not knowing what he was saying, remarked, "God, I sure hope Carol's alone today. Pity the guy Arne catches in bed with her."

"Pity, hell!" I muttered vengefully. "No matter what Arne does, they both got it coming . . ." Fred Sawyer, standing beside me, nodding grimly, indicated the kid's empty truck. Carter had taken the afternoon off again.

Carol's winning streak was snapped this time, because Arne quietly let himself in the back door just as she and Matt were bedding down. What came out of the trial was pretty mixed up. Afterwards Arne just wasn't there anymore. He sounded like a little kid—babbling, babbling—saying nothing. The second day it was all over, and Arne was committed to Lakeview.

Arne might never have known if he hadn't gone to the kitchen to get some aspirins. He noticed a cigarette butt in the sink, one which Carter had hurriedly tossed when Carol gave him the "ready or not." Whatever else Carol did, she didn't smoke. Neither did Arne.

"What's the matter, honey?" Carol called thinly from the bedroom, shagging into her clothes as fast as she could. "Why are you home so early?"

"Hurt my hand," he said, entering the bedroom. "What are you doing in bed?"

"I didn't feel so hot. Was taking a nap. I was just getting up when you came . . ."

Why the dope didn't fall for her act this time, I'll never know. I imagine he must have brooded a lot about what I'd called Carol that time, and somewhere in that muddled head of his a doubt had grown. Now the strange butt, and then the bed routine.

"You were fine this morning," he said slowly, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

"It came on sudden-like, baby," Carol simpered, kissing him, trying to sidetrack him.

It almost worked. Angrily he broke away, began to prowl the room. Carol's eyes widened in fear.

He found Carter in the closet, scared silly, holding his clothes in a tight ball against his naked chest. The sap never had a chance. Stone-cutters with weak arms and wrists just don't last. And Arne was getting to be one of the best. The fingers of his good hand were like steel talons as he dug them into Carter's throat. Carol whined in her throat, tore at Arne's arms, as he beat the man's head savagely against the wall. When Carter fell senseless to the floor, Arne turned on Carol. With one fierce cut, he silenced her.

When they came to, they were in the garage, bound and gagged, both nude, Carter at one end, Carol at the other. I can imagine how Carol must have shrieked into her gag. She knew it was almost the end of the line.

Maybe you don't know what a blasting cap is. Dynamite, contrary to popular belief, doesn't just explode by itself. You have to set it off with another explosion. That's where blasting caps come in. They're everyday equipment at a quarry, and everybody treats them with respect. An accident with one of them could easily blow off your arm. You can see where Arne picked them up.

Arne didn't say much—just bustled around the garage stringing his wires carefully. He watched interestedly as Carter came around, smiled at the frenzied terror that came over his victim's face when he saw the wires hanging out of his mouth, felt the tight tape which wouldn't allow him to spit the hard metal object from his mouth. Perhaps he wondered at the fact that Arne's car was halfway into the garage, its hood up.

"Just like the Fourth of July, Carol," Arne mumbled as he deliberately attached long wires to the ones dangling from Carter's mouth. "Boom!" When Arne approached her with similar wires, she strained insanely against the ropes, nearly gagging on the cap in her mouth, sweat suddenly bathing her distorted face, her naked body. Her eyes pleaded with him, but he paid no heed as he carefully spliced the wires in place, giving the cap a playful tug against her teeth, hurting her. No trace of reason remained in his smile now.

Laboriously he dragged Carter to the extreme corner of the garage, the wire going taut. Carol's eyes bulged almost out of her head as Arne walked to the car, and after a moment's fidgeting, touched

the wire ends to the terminals of the car battery. There was a muffled explosion. Large, thick drops of blood splashed on her body.

In raging fear and hysteria she pushed with all her strength against the garage wall, managing to throw herself flat on the floor. She was rolling on her stomach, screaming dully in her throat, when Arne picked her up and carried her back to what used to look like Carter—

Blood and pulp were all over the garage walls and ceiling. Arne's car was thoroughly splattered, I know because I was one of the first ones there. Returning from a city delivery, I purposely drove past Arne's house to see if anything had happened. When I saw the people running toward the garage, I stopped and ran too.

It was a sickening sight to see. On the edges of my consciousness I heard a woman screaming uncontrollably. A man bolted from the garage gagging. I could only stand it for a minute myself. Where there had once been an attractive woman—only shredded, torn flesh—

Then I got out of there. Fast. As I shagged back to the truck, fighting my stomach, I remember feeling no regrets—only satisfaction, like a weight had been lifted off my back. Carol was finally repaid for the time she dumped me for Garvey.

And Carter? Why did he have to blab so much? Why had he bothered me this morning, telling me about his date with Carol? He wouldn't be looking at my International with those scheming, greedy eyes of his anymore—

Poor dumb Arne. All the time he'd been cutting. Didn't he have sense enough to see that someone had been fooling with the stack of stone on his bench during noon hour—that no matter which piece he took the whole thing was going to come down—?

Practical Demonstration

In Salt Lake City, William E. Lee went to police headquarters for a guided tour. After witnessing the operations of his city's police department, he learned how thieves work. When the tour was over, he found that someone had stolen his car parked outside the station.

Asleep at the Rein

LeRoy Jessop, 60, of Hyrum, Utah, was arrested for drunken driving on a horse. Leonard Jeppson, highway patrolman, said Jessop was asleep in the saddle on a horse walking on the wrong side of the road.

Quick Turnover

A Miami, Fla., used car dealer, Anthony Clausi, 35, discovered a quick way to make $20,000, but it was bound to get him into trouble. Police said he purchased the same Cadillac four times with bogus checks, then resold it for cash.

Alcoholic Daze

Atlanta, Ga., police reconstructed the following sequence of events after a break-in at a chemical company office. The burglar carried some whiskey along with his tools, took a few nips, ransacked desk drawers, sipped again, and broke open a metal box. No money!

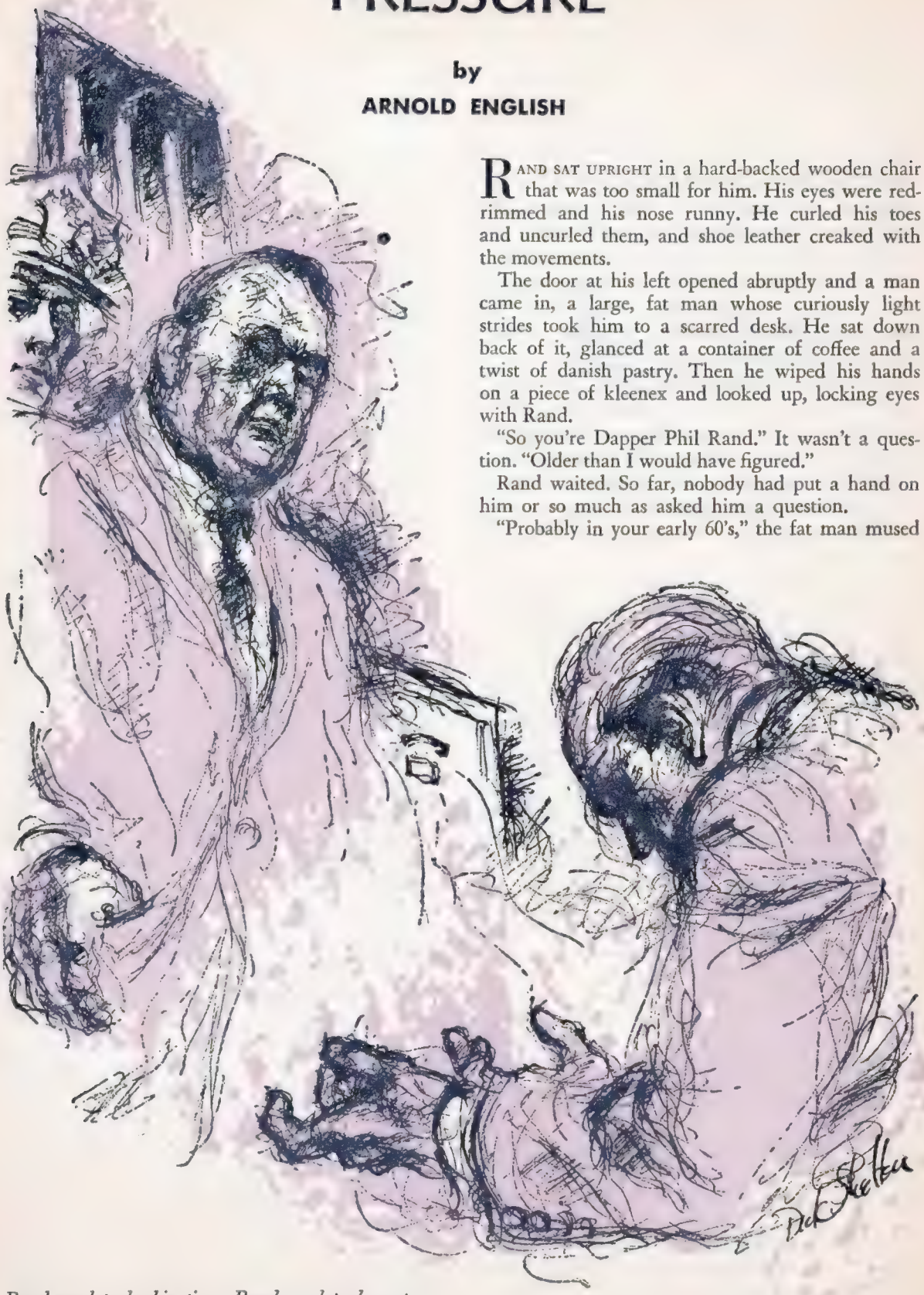
Apparently angered, he piled papers together and set them on fire. He entered another office, tried unsuccessfully to open the safe, then burned some more papers. Finally he killed the bottle and fell asleep.

The first employee to arrive the following morning found him sleeping peacefully beside the empty bottle and a dead fire. Awakened, the yawning stranger inquired: "Where can I get a taxi around here this time of day?" Then he walked out before the startled employee could stop him, leaving behind his kit of tools.

PRESSURE

by

ARNOLD ENGLISH



RAND SAT UPRIGHT in a hard-backed wooden chair that was too small for him. His eyes were red-rimmed and his nose runny. He curled his toes and uncurled them, and shoe leather creaked with the movements.

The door at his left opened abruptly and a man came in, a large, fat man whose curiously light strides took him to a scarred desk. He sat down back of it, glanced at a container of coffee and a twist of danish pastry. Then he wiped his hands on a piece of kleenex and looked up, locking eyes with Rand.

"So you're Dapper Phil Rand." It wasn't a question. "Older than I would have figured."

Rand waited. So far, nobody had put a hand on him or so much as asked him a question.

"Probably in your early 60's," the fat man mused

Rand used to be big time. Rand used to be a powerful guy. But now he was as good as dead . . .

out loud, stopping to sip his coffee and curse its warmth under his breath. "An old gangster. I can't imagine anybody more useless. A lot of gray hair and a reputation, maybe some money and nothing else."

Rand flushed. His lips were shut tight. He cracked his knuckles, then looked down angrily at them.

"A good rep, I'll say that much. A grade-A rep. Dapper Phil Rand is in one league with the Frankie Costellos and Lucky Lucianos. The thinkers, the planners. Number one target for a lot of cops, a guy who's at the age when he ought to be retiring and taking his wife with him to Florida."

"I never got married," Rand said angrily, "and if you want to ask questions, go ahead. Then I'll say I want a lawyer and we can start all over again."

"You know the ropes, all right." The fat cop finished the pastry, wiped his lips with a twist of waxpaper, and blew mouth steam down into the coffee container. "In and out of jails for the last ten years, Phil. Income tax raps and contempt of court. Like Frankie Costello. You're a little more polished, maybe you had a little more education—but not enough."

There was no contempt in the cop's eyes or his behavior. He was absolutely calm, swaying on his chair, cradling the coffee container, or occasionally swivelling around to look out at the quiet night and the tops of buildings that shone gray against a blood-red sky.

"We've got you on a gambling rap," he said finally. "We'll bring you up for trial. The judge will get a lot of publicity out of giving a long lecture and a stiff sentence, Phil, so you'll get both. He's up for re-election soon. A lot of the big shots are up, soon, and they've been good to cops. If we can get you to do some talking to us, it'll mean a lot to them."

Rand grunted. He looked away from the cop's bright shrewd narrowed little eyes and down to the framed studio photographs on the scarred desk.

The cop, following his glances, said, "That's the wife and that's my kid. Kid's married now and got a kid of his own. Very satisfying to a man my age, to know that he'll be leaving a grandson behind him. By the way, my name's Coffee." He looked down at the cup. "Funny, huh?"

"Get to the point." Dapper Phil Rand had the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing what to do with his hands.

"I'm practically there." Coffee gave a regretful sigh. "You know names and dates. You can send 100 people to the chair if you talk. You can tell us about dope smuggling, prostitution, counterfeiting, slot machines, everything that the Syndicate has got a hand in." Coffee's small eyes were fixed on Rand's mouth, as if willing it open. "I want you to talk."

"Can't say I blame you." Rand shrugged. "Every cop in the country would want that."

In spite of his hardness, Rand was beginning to feel friendly toward the man. They were about the same age. They knew the score. No time was being wasted on threats and other foolishness.

"All I can offer you is a chance to keep out of jail for a year and, if you want it, protection for the rest of your life."

"My life wouldn't be worth peanuts if I talked, and I wouldn't want to talk, anyhow."

"So you'll go to jail again," Coffee said heavily. "The wrong place for an old guy. Nobody cares about you and even at your age you're lucky if the homos don't bother you."

"I've been inside," Rand said, a little more tightly.

"And the kids!" Coffee shook his big head. "Tell a young kid you were a big man as far back as prohibition, and the kid laughs at you. Young punks want to make a name for themselves, today. They're crazy. In jail, your connections aren't worth a dime because a young punk could come along and cut you."

Coffee's chubby hands gestured a stabbing. The cop stroked his chin, glanced up at a nearby mirror and brushed his chin again.

"Need a shave," he rumbled. Then he looked up. "I was supposed to go over to my grandson's birthday party, tonight."

"Sorry," Rand said, then looked down, confused.

"Like I was telling you, Phil, I hate to see an older guy headed for the can again. If you talk, you'll have protection for as long as you want it. You can go to another city or state, another country, even, and start all over."

Rand looked down at the network of veins clear on the backs of his hands, and threw back his head in laughter.

"The Syndicate isn't infallible," Coffee prodded. "You can pick a spot in South America, for instance. Good place to retire. A guy can live like a king in some places on forty clams a month."

"No dice." Rand shook his head. "You don't know—never mind."

Rand had wanted to explain that what a family meant to Coffee, Rand's Syndicate connections meant to him. They had taken the same place. They were the only ones with whom he had anything in common. When he and his friends passed a private house, for instance, they would argue pleasantly about how many cribs it might hold, or if it would be an effective pad for some of the dope parties staged by pushers. If he had to live among other men, honest men, he would be a fish out of water.

"No dice," he said again, a little more sharply. "You're not playing in luck tonight. Book me, and let's get it over with."

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it, because I've got to tell you something else." Coffee glanced at his watch. "I've been given orders from the top to put on the maximum pressure to get you to talk."

"I've taken beatings, before."

"But you were a lot younger, then." Coffee shook his head. "No beatings, Phil. I don't suppose you'll talk unless you want to."

It was like a problem in arithmetic, in which various methods of reaching a solution were systematically put aside. Rand, his eyes narrowed and hands clasped in his lap, waited.

"Well," Coffee added, "the pressure's going to be applied, Phil, and it's going to be damned heavy. I know you've been pressured before, but not like this. I don't know that you can take it any more."

"I guess we'll find out."

Coffee nodded slowly. "I guess we will." Again he frowned down at his watch, then turned and called out a name. The door opened abruptly and a uniformed man came in. He was young and blond, with a full head of hair and clear eyes.

Rand looked him up and down warily. Coffee glanced back and said, amused, "Not yet, Phil."

Rand bit down profanity. To the young cop, Coffee said, "See that this man gets a meal if he wants one; or cigarettes, coffee, a shower, whatever. In half an hour exactly, you'll do what I told you, before."

The young cop nodded. Rand stood. His left foot was asleep, and his eyes throbbed. Absentmindedly, he wiped his runny nose with the back of a hand, and at the young cop's amused look, he drew out a large handkerchief.

He was taken to a small room that was probably used for cops who wanted to take a nap. A bed, unmade, was set against one wall, with two pillows next to the headboard. On a small table, crime magazines and Western paperbacks had been placed. The one window was clean except for a comet of dust across the top left.

The young cop, hardly hiding his irritation, arranged for a meal to be followed by a whole container of milk; Rand suffered from an ulcer. Rand ate slowly with steady hands. His brows were quirked in question marks. Time and again he found himself looking furtively at the door. He was aware of the young cop's eyes resting steadily on him and alert to his every move. The young cop might as well have said it out loud: So that's what a big shot looks like, how he moves and eats.

Twenty-five minutes had passed by the time the young cop rose from a soft chair and looked down at Rand.

"Rise and shine, buddy."

Rand stared his resentment, then shut his lips tight. The young cop directed him down a smelly hallway back towards the room in which he had first been pressured by Coffee. The young cop gestured him into the next room, though. It was an office, too. Through the closed door and thin walls, they could hear murmurs and the shuffling of many feet. A lot of people inside Coffee's small office. Rand's ulcer was acting up slightly as he felt stomach tremors. He looked sullenly at the young cop's easy steps and effortless gestures in walking around back of the desk and sitting down.

Quickly, the young cop pulled down the switch on an interoffice communicator. Sounds in the nearby office were much louder to Rand's ears. From the other room, too, the sound of something rapped hard against wood may have been slight, but in Rand's ears it was like thunder.

"Now, gents." That was Coffee's voice, big, self-assured. "You all want a statement for your papers, and I'm going to give you one that'll make history."

Mutters and murmurs. Near Rand, the young cop fingered the communicating switch, probably so that'd be able to break the connection instantly if Rand called out.

Coffee said, "Your city editors, gents, and your readers all like stories about Dapper Phil Rand. Well, we've picked him up on a gambling charge and he's facing another prison sentence."

"I'm starting to feel sorry for Rand," a reporter said. The others laughed.

"Well, gents, Phil Rand doesn't want to go back to prison. He's been in one and out the other for the past few years. Besides, a habitual criminal is subject to stiffer penalties than a first or second offender. So I've made him a little propositon."

There was silence till a reporter asked unbelievingly, "And he's riding with it? Phil Rand?"

"That's it exactly, gents," Coffee said quietly. "He's co-operating."

Although Rand's eyes were on the interoffice machine, he was conscious of the young cop's stare. Rand forced himself to settle back. His left hand shook and he closed it and covered it promptly with the palm of his right. If his friends thought he'd talked, they'd kill him.

"Do you mean Rand is talking?"

"Like a canary, gents, a goddam canary." Coffee cleared his throat. "Dapper Phil Rand is a tired old guy, gents, and his previous sentences softened him up for us. At any rate, we're getting information from him that we plan to act on."

A reporter put in softly, "And just before election time, too. That's lucky as hell . . . thanks a lot."

A series of sounds indicated that the press conference was over. Scraping feet could be heard just outside the door.

Rand looked up to see the young cop's lips stretched in a grin, then looked away. Because the night had grown darker, the lighting here seemed more powerful. In the nearby buildings, as if to help the illusion, most lights had been put out. A star was a very white snowflake against the dark sky.

Suddenly Coffee called out, "Bring him in here."

The young cop was back of Rand as he stood up slowly, the way he usually did, these days. He opened the door and walked into Coffee's room, looked around wildly, then sighed.

The fat cop seemed uncomfortable. A dozen

chairs were scattered around. Smells of stale cigarette smoke hadn't yet been chased out by the opened window. Ashes were sprinkled on the floor. Coffee ran a thick finger inside his collar, then glanced at the young cop and appeared satisfied at the signal that was flashed between them.

"Okay," Coffee said. "Now take these damn chairs out of here." He clasped his hands firmly, and looked across at Rand. "You know the set-up, Phil. You'll be here for another hour. By that time information will be on the radio, at least, about what I said here. Then, if you say that it's what you want, we'll let you go. Your friends will be sure you must've talked, or you'd still be here."

Rand said thinly, "They know I wouldn't talk."

"Will they take a chance on you? Can they afford that? It's good business to take no chances. You'll be knocked off."

"I'll be all right." His voice was high.

"You don't really think so." Coffee sighed. "On the other hand, you can sit back and talk. Tell me everything you know about Syndicate operations. Then you can sneak away to South America, with my help. You can live like a king on . . ."

"I remember," Rand said quietly. "Either I talk to you, or I'm knocked off." He looked down at his watch. "How soon can I get out of here, did you say? An hour?" His voice shook.

Coffee's eyes were narrowed and briefly ugly. He pulled a piece of paper to himself and took a ballpoint pen and began writing quickly. He didn't look up.

"War of nerves." Rand leaned forward. "If I get killed, people will say it's good riddance. Nobody cares what happens to me and that's the way I want it." He drew a deep breath. "The way I like it."

Coffee didn't talk to him again. At the end of an hour, he gestured with one hand . . .

Rand was given back the contents of his pockets by the police property clerk. In front of the headquarters door he paused, looking uncertainly upstairs, then stepped out. The night had turned chilly, and Rand pulled up the lapels of his jacket. He had lived through thousands of similar nights in the past. He gazed steadily, almost hungrily, at a nearby house where people slept, then looked in vain for a cab and began to walk, quickly instead. Almost without knowing it, he was aware of steps following him. Probably one of Coffee's men. Under the next traffic light, he turned to look around.

He recognized the face. It was that of Kid McCall, a known killer who had been brought in from Chicago only three days ago for a job. Another set of steps could be heard back of them, perhaps belonging to a cop who was following, and couldn't know McCall.

Rand paused, looking down at the reflection of the red light on hard sidewalk. In the sight of his friends, Dapper Phil Rand was an old guy who had to be knocked off fast. He nodded twice, then stopped it abruptly.

He glanced up at the squat police building only a block away, then back, and to the gutter. A cab appeared suddenly, cruising. Rand took a step towards it, the instructions, "Police headquarters, fast," already crowding his lips.

Suddenly he paused. What in the world would he do in South America? He'd have no interests at all. Nobody he could talk to, nobody who'd see the world the way he did. He'd be alone in a world that was strange to him, and he was too old to change, too damned old . . .

Rand turned and began to walk towards Kid McCall. In that way, it would be easier for the Kid to get him.

If Rand presented a better target, it would be over more quickly.

You Can't Win

Biloxi, Miss., police reported that Elaine Martinez, 24, a dancer, plunged into the Gulf of Mexico in an alleged suicide attempt. James L. Jenson, a pilot at Keesler Air Force base, jumped in to save her. But Jenson couldn't swim, and the dancer could, and she rescued the struggling airman. Miss Martinez was charged with disorderly conduct.

A Chicago policeman dived into Lake Michigan to rescue a drowning man, gave him artificial respiration and took him to the hospital. After the patient received first aid, the officer arrested him for swimming in a forbidden zone.

Guilty Innocent

Guilty was found innocent in Chicago's Traffic Court after Judge John J. Sullivan dismissed nine traffic charges against Grady Guilty, 22, for lack of evidence. Guilty had been accused of driving a car involved in a personal injury accident.

As he helped her down the steps leading from the Florida resort hotel to the beach, he sensed the stares from lounging bathers. She was ravishingly beautiful in the two-piece white swim suit with her wealth of thick black hair. He sensed their sudden pity, their embarrassment at knowing him. He hated it.

"I want to lie in the sun, darling," she said.

She would never know how he felt. Tall, rangy, darkly tanned in khaki shorts, there was something haunted in Guy Dennison's gaunt face.

"Did you bring a book?" she asked. "You could read to me again."

"I brought one down when I set up the umbrella."

"Which book, darling?"

"One I've been reading to you—about Alaska."

He watched grimly as she stretched out on the blanket, and stared up at the sun she couldn't see. The bandages across her eyes were the smallest Doctor Allmyre could devise. She wore large dark glasses over the bandages and they only showed around the edges. But anybody could tell.

He sprawled beside her. They were a yard from the cool shade of the big red beach umbrella. He wished to hell they were beneath it, in the canvas chairs.

A Novelette

by GIL BREWER

meet me in the dark

Dennison's wife was blind, so Dennison took care of her. But he wasn't taking such good care of himself . . .

"The Gulf must be beautiful today," she said.

"Uh-huh," he said. "Real calm."

He watched a girl, far down the beach, picking up shells and throwing them into the water. A few feet away a young sunburned couple sipped frosted drinks.

It had been six lousy months since Rome chanced to enter his workroom in the garage up in Quebec. Metal working was his hobby. He'd been grinding brass for a lamp on a wheel. Rome leaned over, laughing, and received an abrupt, deadly shower of white-hot brass filings in both eyes. There followed a series of ticklish operations.

"It'll be months before we can take the bandages off for good," the doctor told them. *"But I must warn you. If they come off before that time, she'll probably see fine for an hour or so. Only it won't last. There will be nothing we can do then—ever. Why don't you two take a vacation . . . ?"*

The doctor had showed Guy how to apply fresh bandages in a dark room. It was hellish to think about.

Nothing was the same any more. She always read a great deal. Now he had to read to her all the time. Morning, afternoon, evening, and bedtime.

"Guy? Couldn't I go in the water?"

"Up to you," he said. "If you like, of course."

"It troubles you. We won't bother."

He held his breath. "Don't talk like that."

"I can't help my imagination," she said. "I'm sorry." Fumbling, she touched his arm. "I'm sorry, Guy."

It shouldn't hit him the way it did. He heard it too much lately. He started to comfort her, then every muscle in his body went taut and the sensation of abrupt panic sent sweat beading at every pore.

A girl in a Bikini bathing suit stood out there by the water, staring at him. She carried a white terry-cloth robe and a small alligator purse with a long strap. It was the same girl he'd noticed down the beach, throwing shells in the water.

It was one girl he never wanted to see again. Not since that night four days ago. But there were too many people around for him to do anything, motion her away. They all knew him and his wife.

The girl moved toward him, her golden hair shimmering in the violent sunlight. Her body was full, lithe, soft, and she smiled at him.

Her name was Janine Bonney. She was maybe nineteen, and beautiful in a way that got a man where it was tender.

He looked at her, shaking his head slightly.

She gave a tiny nod, then began writing in the sand four feet from his side with a crimson-tipped toe.

"BAR—" she wrote. "NOW."

She glanced once at him to see if he got it, then crossed it out with a single flourish of her foot, and moved lithely off toward the steps.

2.

He looked quickly around to see if anyone had noticed. Don't be stupid, he thought. They noticed.

"Wish I could walk around like that," Rome said.

"Like what?"

"That woman who just went by."

"I didn't see any woman. Only an old man."

"It sounded like a woman. They walk different from men." She sighed. "One thing, I can't watch you ogling all the naked female flesh around here."

He forced a laugh. "Why ogle with you right here?"

"Don't kid me," she said. "Men are all alike."

He checked to see if she were smiling. She was. It was all right. Lately she'd shown touches of an evil jealous streak he'd never before noticed.

It scared him a little.

He could never afford scandal. He had plenty of money, but every cent depended on his leading an unsullied existence; staying married till death. His crazy alcoholic father had seen to that before he died. One slip and he would lose everything.

Every time he got on the subject, he began to scheme. He couldn't help himself. He no longer loved Rome. Rome was a bore. It grew worse daily. It ate into him like a raw, seething acid, and never let him be.

There was even that chance she would never see again—ever. What then!

He would have to make some excuse so he could go up to the bar and see what Janine wanted. He'd have to get rid of the girl for good. She was a lush and cooperative package, but she threatened a luxurious life.

He told himself to relax. Rome didn't know Janine.

"Baby," he said. "I'm going to run up to our rooms—get my sunglasses."

"You could use mine," she said. "It's really very silly, my wearing sunglasses."

"They wouldn't fit." He eyed the bottle of sun-tan lotion on the far edge of the blanket. "I'll get the sun-tan lotion, too. Sun's fierce today."

He stood up, scooped the small bottle of oil into his palm, tossed it on one of the beach chairs, just in case.

"Don't wander around, now," he said softly.

She made a small sound which wasn't quite a laugh.

Janine was waiting at the rustic bar on the outside gallery. A juke box boomed rock 'n' roll.

"Hello, Hungry," the girl said.

She called him "Hungry." He was—for the kind of life he wanted to lead but couldn't.

He had to act sore now, and get rid of her.

"Did I surprise you?" she said, giving him the look; the one with all the hot promise in it.

He slid onto the stool beside her, ordered a bottle of beer he didn't want. Janine poked at a frozen daquiri with a long green straw. The white beach robe was piled on the bar with the alligator purse. She was lushly gorgeous and practically naked in the tight, scant orange kerchiefs bound around her full hips and breasts. Her lips would taste hot and soft and salty. It made him suck his breath with instinctive, primitive emotion.

"Do something for me," he said.

"Depends, honey."

"Go far away someplace."

Her laugh was a throaty, low-down laugh, the same laugh he'd liked so much a few nights ago.

"You flip me, Hungry," she said. "You really do."

There was no breeze. He began to perspire heavily. Janine looked as cool as a head of lettuce. Only she would be hot to the touch.

"Look, baby," he said. "I mean it. Scat."

"My friends call me Bunny," Janine said. "You called me Bunny the other night." She tapped his shoulder. "I'm wearing a new bathing suit." She snickered. "Just for you. Like?"

She showed him the bathing suit, leaning away from him on the stool, which only seemed to thrust everything closer. Her knee touched his. Then she was laughing at him with her eyes, with the bright slash of her red mouth. She crossed her slimly-plump legs.

"You're scared she'll find out about us. Rome, your wife. That wouldn't be so hot, would it, Hungry?"

He heard the hoarse sound of his voice. "What do you know about my wife?"

"Everything," Janine said. "About you, too." Her voice dripped sarcasm. "A real-estate salesman from Tampa, on vacation." Her eyes were hard. "What a line!"

It jarred him. He didn't like it at all.

She patted him on the thigh. "We could go to my place, like the other night. It's not far down the beach."

"I was plastered the other night. You know that."

"Let's say tomorrow night? Tennish? That'll give your sweet wife time to be in bed and asleep." She smiled, brushed thick blonde hair away from her face. "You were quite the sport before you met her, huh?"

He frowned, sensing trouble. He remembered the man he'd met in the bar the night he'd ended up with Janine. Steve Larkin. Larkin had introduced them.

He wanted to leave. But now he couldn't. He had to find out what she meant.

"Traveled all over the world, didn't you, Hungry? Met your wife in Montreal. She was the daughter of a college professor. Bet she fell like a ton for big handsome you, with your yacht anchored in the river."

He felt too shaky to speak.

"Guy Dennison," Janine said. "Adventurer-playboy-extraordinary." She laughed softly. "The Dennison millions. Tell me truthfully, Hungry. How much's left of them li'tle ol' millions?"

How did she know these things? His throat was dry, and the muscles around his heart formed a kind of tight cramp that would not relax.

"A million or so, maybe? You're rich—and, honey, I'm going to be rich, too. You're going to help me."

He knew. It was obvious. He felt utterly defeated.

3.

Somebody slapped his shoulder. He reacted anxiously, startled. It was Steve Larkin, half tight. Larkin was a red-haired six-footer who apparently did little but lush it up, tell jokes, and hunt women. He wore a white shirt and gray flannels. Larkin had seen him leave Janine's motel the morning after they'd been drinking.

"Gonna make another night of it, hey?" Larkin said.

"Just leaving," Guy said, thinking I can't leave!

"Guy doesn't feel well, Steve," Janine said.

"Darn shame," Larkin said, trailing whisky fumes.

"Look, Steve," Janine said. "See you later, huh? There's something I want to discuss with Guy."

Larkin frowned. "I'm deeply hurt," he said. "But don't you two run out on me." He whacked them both on the shoulder and left the bar.

Guy rose unsteadily from the stool.

"Better wait," Janine said. "You haven't seen the pictures yet."

The cramp around his heart tightened.

"You know," she said. "Pix. Snaps. Photos. They're real nice of us, too. You and me. I'm sure you'd like to see 'em—maybe you'd want 'em all for yourself, even."

"What are you trying to do?" His voice was hoarse.

"Maybe you'd better come over tonight, 'stead of tomorrow, huh? I'll show you the pictures. Maybe you'd like to come over, anyway. It's okay with me. I like you, Hungry—really, I do."

He turned sharply and walked blindly off. He heard her soft laughter following him.

He found Rome where he had left her. Where else could she go? He stood there a moment, with everything swarming through him, like heavy sludge.

"You've been gone awfully long," Rome said.

He winced. She was sitting up with her hands clasped around her knees. He began to hate her all the more. If he were free, he'd be able to handle this, somehow.

"I was thirsty—stopped for a beer."

"Get your sunglasses?" she asked.

"Yeah. Sure." Now, she'll ask me for them, he thought. Ask to try them on. He should have picked them up. "The oil, too," he said. He snatched the bottle of lotion off the canvas beach chair.

"Guy? I'd really like to go in the water."

"Okay."

"Just wading, of course." She put her head down, took her lower lip between her teeth, then laughed with short bitterness. "Think of it. *Me—wading!"*

She had been an expert swimmer and had taken several trophies, both here and abroad. He knew it troubled her.

He said, "Wouldn't you rather go in after lunch?"

"Let's go in now."

If she made him stay out here all afternoon, he'd go mad. He dropped the bottle of sun-tan lotion, held her arm, pulled her to her feet.

She came against him, put her arms around him. It embarrassed him. What if people saw—people who had just seen him with the blonde?

"Guy," she said, "I'll never let you go—ever!" There was something savage about it. "I love you more than you'll ever realize." She paused. "Kiss me!"

"Not here, Rome."

Her lips were already against his, and there was something savage about the kiss, too, and the hard pressure of her body. Then she turned away.

He walked her to the water. He really wanted to run down the beach to Janine's motel; make her talk—wring the damned truth out of her.

They started into the water, close together. The fact that they had once been extremely happy together seemed outlandish and impossible.

"Is the color like the Mediterranean?"

Would she never cease? Who in hell cared what color the goddamned water was? It was wet, wasn't it?

The water was up to their chests.

"It's delicious," she gasped. "Look, I can float."

"Be careful, Rome."

She was a short distance away. He watched her.

"Guy," she said quietly. "I'm going to swim."

"Cut it out. You know what Allmyre said."

"My eyes are closed. Here, you hold my glasses." Her hair was already soaked. "Don't try to stop me, Guy!"

He dove for her, grabbed her arm just in time.

"What's got into you?" he said curtly. He felt her go limp under his hands. He felt her resignation.

"All right," she said. "We'll go back to the beach. I'll lie in the sun like a good girl."

4.

She was getting out of hand. He held her tightly and they returned to the blanket. He felt the stares of people around them. And right then, it struck him.

She's becoming bitter, he thought. She doesn't seem to care. What will my life be, with a blind woman?

Yes—he could get her out there in the water and urge her to swim. Tell her it was all right, so long as she kept her eyes closed. Tell her he'd been wrong. It wouldn't hurt anything. He would swim beside her. Get her far out in the Gulf and keep her headed out and tell her she was swimming toward shore. Then, once out far enough so people on the shore couldn't see—he'd put her head under water and hold it there until. . . .

The bathers on the beach must have seen them today, heard Rome insist he let her swim. He would say he'd been unable to stop her. She was an expert swimmer; that could be checked. Despondent, she'd gotten away from him.

He would be free—free of the damnable position his father had left him in. Free to fight Janine Bonney, or sleep with her. He'd be able to live again.

The biting inclusion in his father's will held only during his marriage. He was supposed to marry but once. In case of divorce, he would lose the inheritance, and the entire monies would revert to charity. He'd only been left the money because he'd managed to marry before his father's death, and soft-soap him into believing he'd turned over a new leaf. Rome had been full of fun and laughter . . . no more—he hated every moment.

His father had become a heavy boozer toward the end, and didn't want his only son to end up the same.

If Rome died, the money would be his. The old man hadn't figured he would kill her.

But if a breath of scandal touched the Dennison name, he would lose the money, too. The lawyers would fix that.

"Guy?" Rome said. "I'll never try that again. Don't worry. I don't know what came over me."

He couldn't trust his voice.

"I'm sorry, if I frightened you," she said softly.

He stared at her. What if he *couldn't* talk her into it? What if she meant what she said; that she wouldn't try swimming again . . . never go near the water? He couldn't drag her across the beach and throw her in.

He'd have to talk with Janine—make sure.

He thought back to that night; sneaking out when Rome was asleep, meeting Larkin, drinking, then Larkin introducing him to Janine—and waking on the strange bed the next morning, when Janine showed from another room, carrying a coffee pot. He started dressing.

"Fixing some breakfast, honey," she said. "Stick around." She had on a white Spanish mantilla, draped over her shoulders. That was all she wore—

that and a smile and the coffee pot.

"I've got to go. I'll see you."

She came to the door with him, was rubbing him good-by, when Steve Larkin drove past in his car.

Steve ran him back to the hotel.

"You liked Bunny, eh? She's quite a kid."

He sneaked in just as Rome awakened. He told her he'd got up bright and early to see the sunrise.

"I slept like a log," she said. "I sleep an awful lot these days."

You telling me, he thought. "It's the air," he said. "It does that to you."

He had figured he would never see the blonde again.

5.

Now, this afternoon, like all afternoons, he had to read to Rome while she lay in bed. The book about Alaska. He saw no possible way to break from her long enough to see Janine. He felt nervous and ill. He read monotonously, his thoughts a blocked moiling of fear and worry.

He wanted to tell Rome her lipstick was cockeyed, but didn't. He wasn't sure how she would react. It was sloppy. He supposed she would eventually cease wearing lipstick.

Beneath the light white dressing gown she wore, her shape was as lush and exciting as ever.

"Guy?" Rome said. "Come over here beside me."

He laid the book open on the end table and sat beside her. She took his hands fiercely and pulled him down to her.

All he could think was, What am I going to do?

"This life is boring to me, too, darling. But I can't do anything about it," she said.

"Stop talking like that, Rome."

He ran his hands through her hair, forcing himself to be gentle. She had taken a shower, but her hair was still stiff from the salt water. It irritated him, like everything else about her. Abruptly, he recalled his hands running through Janine's hair—soft, fine, cool. Hot blood rushed and throbbed in his head.

"Bet you'd like to get out," she said. "Have fun."

He sat up perspiring. "Of course not."

"You'd say that, anyway."

The room was quiet for a time and he listened to her breathe. He felt curiously afraid of her just then, and was unable to imagine why.

"Kiss me, Guy."

He kissed her, suddenly conscious of the lipstick.

"You can read a little more, now. Then I think I'll take a nap." She stroked his damp hands. "Guy, my darling—I don't know what I'd ever do without you."

"You'll never have to do without me."

He picked up the book, closing it accidentally, and returned to the chair. He was so worried he couldn't recall where they had left off. She finally told him.

Fully clothed, he lay on his bed, waiting in the dark. It was after ten. Rome would soon be asleep. The connecting doors between their bedrooms was closed.

"Might read late," he'd told her. "Might wake you."

There was a breeze off the Gulf, but he perspired a great deal. He couldn't turn on the air-conditioning, because he wouldn't be able to hear how she breathed. He had made her the excuse that it wasn't healthful. He lay rigid, eager to get going. But what if Rome woke up, came to him for something—found him gone. . . .

He lit another cigarette, took two drags, mashed it in the overflowing tray. There had been other women, but he'd never fouled up before. Lawyers his father had appointed were satisfied he had settled down with Rome.

Rising, he cautiously opened the connecting door, moved to her bed, and listened. She was asleep. He was momentarily overcome with nostalgia. Maybe he could endure it. Rome might see again and become her old self.

Black laughter threatened to burst past his lips.

They would be broke. All the money would be gone paying blackmail. But maybe there was a way out.

He left by the door from his room, and walked down the sandy path to the beach.

6.

"Well, Hungry—you finally showed."

Janine wore yellow shorts and halter. He had to admit that she looked lovely. Inside she was a devil.

There was a bedroom and modernistically furnished living room and kitchenette. A beige rug covered the floor and soft music filtered through the partially closed bedroom door.

"All right," he said. "Let's get on with it."

"You're terribly brusque, Hungry. Care for a drink?"

He shook his head, watching her.

"I have some excellent scotch," she said.

"No doubt."

She shrugged, opened a cupboard above a small bar separating the kitchenette from the living area. Turning, she held a black automatic in her hand.

"I know how to use this," she said. "Just in case."

He watched her lay the gun on the bar and draw something else from the cupboard. She turned, smiling.

"These photographs," she said, flapping the packet against her thigh. "You try to destroy them,

it won't hurt. I have the negatives. Developed 'em myself."

He reached and snatched them from her, filed quickly through them. They were expert. They were also obvious, like a black burn in the center of a white linen tablecloth. Whoever had taken them stood by the bedroom window, outside. Eight in all, they weren't blurred. Janine and he lay on the bed with a bottle, naked.

"This is good of me, here," she said, leaning close to point with a crimson-tipped finger. "Of course, my hair's sort of messed up—but what could you expect? And both of us are nice and sharp and clear." She paused. "Look—you can even read the label on the bottle."

He wanted to strangle her. She was calm, matter-of-fact. As if they were looking at the family album.

He had the impulse to tear them up, eat them—he hurled them showering across the couch. Everywhere he looked he saw himself and Janine, naked on the bed.

"Don't you like the pictures, Hungry?"

He grabbed her arm, shook her back and forth. He hurled her away as he had the pictures. She tripped and sprawled violently across the couch, her hair shimmering in a vicious snarl under the indirect lighting.

"Steve!" she cried, coming to her knees.

Guy turned swiftly. Steve Larkin entered the room, the bedroom door whipping back against the wall. Larkin's face was red, eyes inflamed. Guy dove at him. Larkin stepped in and swung a savage right that rushed in a blur toward Guy's face.

He felt the sodden impact. The rock-hard shock threw him dizzily back against the couch on top of Janine. She squealed, squirming, and Larkin sprang at him, pulled him up by the shirt front and slammed him again. This time it was the left eye.

"The gun!" Janine gasped.

Guy spun to his feet, ready for Larkin. But the other man had snatched the gun from atop the bar. Guy sank back on the couch. Larkin breathed heavily, then put the gun back on the bar.

"I'll bruise," Janine whispered. "He marked me, damn him!"

"Shut up," Larkin said. "You couldn't do like I asked, could you? Always got to dress it up. You're a fool, Bunny—" Reaching out, he slapped her face hard.

"Steve," she said. "Don't *act* like that."

Larkin breathed heavily. "You'd foul things up fine, all right." He smeared sweat from his face. "Suppose he got the gun—you can't trust a guy like him. Damn you, Bunny—I'd like to. . . ."

"You're drunk, Steve!"

"Not half drunk enough. Sometime, by God, I will be!"

"You two are a great pair," Guy said. His left eye was swelling, the pain ricocheting inside his skull.

"Sure," Larkin said. "We work by flat rate. We want a hundred thousand. That's what buys the pictures—and the negatives."

It awed him. For a moment, he almost laughed. "You'll pay, Hungry, m'boy."

A hundred thousand dollars for eight photographs. They were mad.

"My face is swelling," Janine said.

Larkin's voice was nasty. "You been ripe for it."

She rose, took two hesitant steps toward the man. "You can't talk to me like that, you big pig!"

"No?" he said brightly. He lunged toward her, slammed his hand against the other side of her face. She smashed against the wall.

Larkin mopped more sweat off his brow. "Now your face'll really have something to swell about."

She sobbed in her throat, turned and rushed into the bedroom. The door slammed.

Larkin stared at the door, then came over to Guy.

"About that hundred grand," he said.

"How could I get hold of that much money?"

"Don't give me any sob stuff. Wire your New York bank. We know all about you, Dennison. You'll pay. You know damned well you've got to—right?"

They watched each other.

"You talk like a long-playing record when you're loaded," Larkin said. "Of course, we helped you along with a dash of chloral in your drink to numb you up—then a needle. You jabbered your head off."

They had him pinned to the mat. He saw no way out. He didn't have a hundred thousand dollars to throw away—there were no more millions; that was gone long ago. His father had left debts, he'd made more. Most of his money was tied up in stocks, which gave him a healthy income. It would mean selling some of them, making the lawyers suspicious.

Guy rose unsteadily from the couch, walked past Larkin to the door.

"Okay," Larkin said. "There's no hurry. Tomorrow night, you'll give us the word. Right here, same time as tonight. Either that, or we give you the business."

Guy looked at the man. Larkin was grinning.

"Newspapers?" Larkin said. "Stuff like that?"

Guy said nothing. He walked outside, and started down toward the beach. He moved like a sleepwalker—or maybe a Zombie, because he felt dead all over.

Back in his room, he donned pajamas, then switched on the light and started for Rome's room, to check. He stopped short. He'd left a long row of sandy footprints from his door, across the maroon carpet. He brushed them patiently away, and it made him feel better.

In the bathroom, he inspected his eye. By morning it would be a technicolor extravaganza. He

bathed it in cold water. It didn't help. He went in and checked on Rome. She was sleeping deeply, as always.

He thought of her swimming far out into the Gulf, directionless, tiring—until she drowned.

He returned to his bed, stretched out. One hundred thousand dollars . . . a one hundred thousand dollar piece.

He lay there straining, smothering the black laughter with his hand over his mouth.

Dawn came and he finally slept. He dreamed—of water, death—and darkness.

8.

They sat on the beach the next day under the umbrella in the canvas chairs. Rome was really in the sun, but he was in the shade. He would have shriveled up and died in the sun like the carcasses of dead fish that floated onto the beach—to be meticulously gathered up by their tails and taken quickly away in a paper towel by one of the colored houseboys.

Dead fish did not exist here.

Everybody had gawped openly at his colorful eye.

"Guy? I asked you something. What's the matter?"

"Just a headache, is all."

"You seem to have a lot of them lately, Guy."

He wanted to yell, get stinking drunk, anything but sit here and listen to her inane chatter. It was killing him by degrees. Next, she'd want him to read to her. About Alaska. Eskimo villages. Sea lions. . . .

"I can listen to the radio, anyway," she said. "I can't see anything. I never used to listen to the radio. I used to laugh at those soap-operas—but, you know something? They hook you. They really do, Guy. It's getting so I can't bear to miss some of them. I suppose it sounds funny. I never realized I'd like them."

He groaned inwardly. He could see them in years to come, sitting around the goddamned radio, commenting critically on the witty dialogue in the soap-operas.

He could feel her own pitiful condition, her self-pity, clawing out with steel fingers, snarling him along with her in their inevitable web of slow mental stagnation and soul destruction.

Or, worse still: *"You watch the TV, darling, and I'll listen and you can tell me what's happening."*

They sat there. Neither spoke for some time.

He finally said, "Rome? What say we take a dip?"

The meaning behind the words was orgasmic to him, tossing him wildly up on a violent thrill of crazy exaltation. He hung there, cresting.

"Now, Guy?"

He hung there, savagely suspended, his fingers rigid in the sands beside the chair, a voice screaming monstrously in his head, *Say yes, say yes, say yes!*

"I must tell you something, Guy—a secret."

He continued to hang there, every muscle taut, his body a bent spring of emotion.

"I'm never going swimming again," she said.

He collapsed. His fists dug into the sand. He hurled it showering before him, listening to her words as she spoke on, through a strange red fog.

She spoke softly. "Yesterday, I tried something very foolish, Guy. I was despondent. I wanted to—well, I was actually thinking about suicide, darling. I'm over it now." She found his arm, gripping it with her fingers, her face strained toward him. "I didn't want to be a burden to you. I was being selfish. I know you love me as I love you. I realized I frightened you. You'll never have to worry again. I swore to myself, I would never go into the water again, Guy—never."

He had a very slim hold on himself now. "Isn't—isn't that rather drastic?"

"Anyway—that's how it is."

He patted her hand. He hoped she didn't feel how tense he was. "I really wouldn't worry, then," he said. "So you could go swimming. We'll go together. I'll be right with you—every minute. And—I promise, I won't worry." The last words nearly choked him.

"No, Guy. I know you're trying to make me feel better. But I'll never go into the water again."

He knew she meant it. He lay back with his eyes tightly closed. He lay that way for some time.

The chance was gone. Time was running out, trickling away, like the sands washed by the Gulf.

Opening his eyes, he saw Janine, wearing the orange Bikini. He closed his eyes, sitting in a dark stupor.

"Hello, there, Hungry!"

It nearly jerked him out of the chair. He snapped his eyes open. She stood before him, flaunting herself.

"Hello," he said weakly.

She winked at him, then moved off. She had a terrific walk, and every eye on the nearby beach followed her.

All except Rome.

"Who was that, Guy?"

He didn't know what to say. "One of the maids," he said. "The one cleaned up our rooms this morning."

"Oh. Did she call you that—Hungry?"

"I guess so. Odd, isn't it?" Every pore in his body dripped perspiration. "Said something this morning, about my looking hungry, or something."

"I see," Rome said. "Is she pretty?"

"Hardly." He forced a laugh. It sounded forced. "Anyway, she's not my type." He rushed madly on without the slightest idea of where he was going, like a car out of control on icy pavement. "Besides—she's a colored maid."

"She didn't sound it."

"That's because everybody down here talks with an accent. You're used to it."

He was out of breath. It was one hell of an experience. He was drenched as if he'd been swimming. He felt he was dying. He had to have a drink—immediately.

He made an excuse and headed for the bar.

9.

Janine met him at the steps. He wanted to shout at her, find out why she had pulled such a crazy stunt as to speak to him down there. But they were in full view of everybody. They walked up the steps toward the hotel bar and her plump hip brushed against him.

"Gee, Hungry—it was like your wife looked at me."

"Well, she didn't." He turned and grasped her arms. "Why did you do that? Everybody saw you—she's not deaf!"

Janine didn't smile. "So you wouldn't forget what can happen. It was my idea—and I don't want a drink."

"I've got to talk with you, Janine!"

"Nuts."

He was desperate. "Bunny!"

She fluffed her hair and smiled. "Tonight, honey—tonight. Maybe tonight I'll be real nice to you." She laughed softly and moved back down the steps, her hips bunching suggestively, her hair golden and glorious in the sun. He went to the bar, then returned to Rome.

"Did you enjoy your beer, Guy?"

"Oh, yeah. Fine."

"Did she have on a bathing suit, Guy?"

"Who?"

"The girl who called you hungry?"

"The maid, you mean? For God's sake, no. She had on some sort of a white uniform."

Diabolically, he would have liked to describe Janine Bonney to her. How luscious and succulent Janine was, with her ripe body bared and bulging around the scant Bikini.

Thinking desperately, he wondered if he could get Janine alone and torture her into giving up the negatives. But then he'd have to kill her to shut her up. He realized he was thinking about killing as if it were the easiest thing in the world. He laughed to himself. He had the nerve to think of killing somebody. But that was as far as it went.

All you have to do is call the police, he thought. Larkin and Janine would be off his neck. Then—the ramifications. The morning papers after they talked. He began to laugh. He couldn't stop. He roared aloud, shaking the canvas chair, his head flung back.

"Let me in on it, will you?" Rome said soberly.

"An old joke I happened to remember," he gasped.

"Tell me, Guy!" She was smiling, excited.

"For God's sake, Rome—lay off me!"

It shocked her. "Yes," she said. "All right."

On the way back to the hotel, he mumbled words of endearment to her. She was strangely quiet.

Well, tonight he would see Janine and Larkin, tell them getting the money would take some time. But he *would* pay them off, burn the prints and negatives. It was the only way. He became elated thinking about it.

He would have a little money left. Properly invested, he would make out. Maybe Rome would be okay, her old self, after she took off the bandages.

He chilled—suppose they retained certain negatives, kept them to bleed him slowly. No—he dismissed the thought.

Pay them. He would even have a drink with them. "Here's hell!" he would say. "Here's to crime, you blackguards!" Toasting the one hundred thousand. Let them have it. It was high time one of the Dennison tribe got to work and made some money, instead of spending.

In the back of his mind he knew it was all hogwash. But he kept saying the words in a kind of deadly rote.

10.

That night, stepping into the darkness of eleven o'clock, he realized he was late. He had taken no chances. Rome was sound asleep, snoring softly.

A shadow detached itself from a tall hedge of Australian pine. It was Janine. She came up to him, wearing a white dress that rustled as she moved.

"Shhhhhhh!" he warned.

"Listen, Hungry," she said, gripping his arm. "I thought I'd come and meet you. Steve's pretty high—rampaging around. I'm a little frightened."

"Tough."

"Anyway," she said. "Let's go to my place. Steve'll be along later. You got the money with you, honey?"

He didn't answer. Make the witch wait.

"Just imagine what people will say when they see those pictures! You and li'tle me, all alone, like that!"

They moved down along the beach.

"Suppose I killed you, Janine—right now. I could, you know? The way I feel? Who would ever know?"

She laughed. "Don't worry. I've got insurance. That's why I can like you and everything, all at the same time."

She excited him. She was a witch, out to ruin him, yet, kind of nice as witches went. He was a typical Dennison; lusting after the very woman who

would toss him to the dogs. He didn't see how he could possibly get a hundred thousand dollars' worth. He put his arm around her, felt the lush movement of her hip.

They reached her apartment, went inside. Soft light suffused the room. She moved to the cupboard, and he saw the automatic lying there. She brought out the pictures.

"We can look at the pictures till Steve gets here. He wants to transact the business. We'll have fun, huh?"

Abruptly, he saw her for what she was. She was really sneering at him—laughing at him.

"How about a drink?" he said.

"Sorry—I'm afraid we're all out. Steve said he'd bring something. Let's sit down and look at the pictures, honey." Her voice was full of insinuation.

A thought occurred to him. He became excited.

"Listen," he said, desperately trying to keep the urgency out of his voice. "I'll go buy a bottle. Then we can have a drink, just you and me—and look at the pictures—and wait for Steve?"

She winked slyly. "I'll change into something more comfortable. There's a liquor store just down the road."

"Maybe we'd better make the most of what we have, eh?"

She banged the packet of pictures against her thigh. All he could think was—Get her plastered and get those negatives and prints from her. Her lips were very red, her eyes a deep, exciting blue.

"I'll hurry," he said, turning toward the door.

11.

The liquor store was farther down the road than he'd figured. He had no car. Getting her plastered would be a pleasure. He wasn't fool enough to think she actually went for him—but she was the type would try to get back at Larkin for how he'd acted toward her. She would probably do anything. Still, *he* was a rich man. It maybe built her ego, just being with him.

He would promise her anything—really feed her a line—maybe even try and get her to cross Larkin. Get her helpless drunk.

It was the big chance. If he could get the negatives, they'd be stopped. He saw the lights ahead: DAD'S LIQUORS.

Moments later, returning along the highway shoulder, he uncapped the fifth of whisky and took two stiff belts.

He stopped on the road in front of the motel. A motorcycle cop was sitting astride his glinting machine, joking with a man by the office.

Guy detoured around the back of the half-circle of buildings, edging among palms and azalea bushes. Pausing, he took another slug of whisky. He felt good.

It didn't last. The instant he opened the door to Janine's apartment, he knew something was wrong.

Clothes were strewn in a running heap, leading from the open bedroom door. The living room was brightly lighted. Tables and chairs were overturned. The cupboard doors flapped open. The rear door in the kitchen stood open, and he could see the Gulf of Mexico shining out there.

"Janine?" he called softly.

No answer.

"Bunny?" he called.

Leaving the front door open, he set the bottle on the floor, moved across the room. He stopped short.

Janine lay sprawled on the beige carpet, clothed in nothing but torn, sheer black panties and bra. Her features were just barely recognizable.

She was dead. Her skull had been shattered. Her beautiful blonde hair soaked now in rich dark blood that still pulsed from fresh wounds. The small black automatic lay on the floor beside her.

It was obvious. Larkin had returned, bitter with drink. He'd caught her getting ready for Guy. She'd probably defied Larkin. Larkin had lost his head, killed her, battered her to death with the blood-stained gun.

The photographs—the negatives. . . .

He sprang to the cupboard. Nothing there. He began a frantic search of the living room, the bedroom. He was lost unless he found those pictures.

Larkin had them—of course.

The apartment was a shambles. He kept searching, inspecting every drawer, every piece of clothing, behind mirrors, in the lavatory water tank, the medicine chest.

They were gone. He was back where he had started, only now there was murder on his hands.

A woman screamed. He ducked past the body of the girl toward the kitchen door. He saw the woman standing at the open front door, pointing at the body, screaming.

He rushed through the door, turned to the right and ran full tilt into Steve Larkin. Larkin was drunk.

"Dennison!" Larkin gasped. "She's dead, you hear?"

Guy swung hard at the man's face. His fist caught a shoulder and he swung again, sinking it to the wrist in Larkin's solar-plexus. He followed it with a bright left cross that splattered against the big man's face.

Larkin reeled backward. Guy leaped past him. He knew he had to get away—back to Rome—the hotel.

"Stop!" Larkin yelled, running after him.

Guy stumbled toward the beach across loose sand.

"Halt!" somebody called loudly. "Halt!"

12.

His feet hit the hard-packed sand of the beach. He

heard Larkin curse, then two shots. Then another shot.

Guy sprawled flat, panting, and peered back over the edge of a low bank. The motel was flooded with light.

"Got him," somebody said. "It's him, all right. He's covered with her blood. Look at his hands."

"Oh, Lord!" a woman said. "And I must've been right next door when it happened. I knew there was something wrong about them. I heard him beating up on her. I told Howard, I said. . . ."

"All right, lady—move along, now."

Guy watched, fighting for breath. They hadn't seen him. But what matter? He had to go up there and search Larkin's pockets. The negatives would be on Larkin. He had to act fast, because if Larkin were dead, the first thing they would do was search him.

He sobbed to himself as he returned up past the palms, along the other side of the motel. He walked in the entrance, making it real jaunty. People hurried from doorways, moving toward the far end of the motel.

Nearing Janine's door, he stopped a man.

"What's up?" Guy said.

"Murder," the man said. "But they got the killer. Her husband—he's dead. What a mess!"

He went on. People had formed a circle around the body. It lay in the sand-spurs and dry grass behind the motel. Guy squeezed through the circle until he stood at the inner edge of people.

The patrolman he'd seen out front on the motorcycle knelt beside Larkin's body. He was a young cop, the bill of his cap glinting above a scowl.

"All right," the cop said. "Clear it out, now—he's dead, isn't that enough?"

A woman said, "Well, I like that!"

The cop turned to a man. "Where's a phone?"

So far the patrolman hadn't gone through Larkin's pockets. There was still time.

He had to have those negatives. He shoved over by the cop, knelt beside him, his heart tightening with panic.

"Who was he?" he asked.

He could have bitten his own tongue off. It would send the cop for Larkin's wallet.

"Who the hell are you," the cop said. "What you want?"

Desperation seized him. "Nothing," he said. His voice was strained. "I was just—" He looked at his hands, standing up. "Just wondering who he was, that's all."

The cop stared at him, frowning.

Guy shrugged and backed through the crowd. There was nothing to be done. Larkin had the pictures on him somewhere—or maybe hidden. They would be found. They might even think he, Guy Dennison, had killed Janine.

There was the woman who had looked through the door.

Had she seen him? Could she describe him?

He began to run back toward the hotel, remembering Rome. Suppose the police looked him up? How could he explain it to Rome?

He ran along the beach, now, running fast.

They would go away, leave tonight. He'd make some excuse to her. Something she would believe.

They would have to leave tonight.

Tomorrow the papers would be full of it. They wouldn't print the pictures, but the stories would be there. They would fly to New York tonight, and he'd draw all the money out of the bank tomorrow morning. That way he'd have the money—whatever he could get in cash, anyway.

Then let the story burst—damn them.

He would worry about Rome later. She would have her sight back. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad. The money, though. That was what counted. He had only hours to achieve the thing. All he had to do was be in New York when the banks opened tomorrow morning.

He really knew fear now.

13.

"You awake, Rome?"

"Yes."

She had moved when he looked through the connecting doors, rolled over on the bed. The lights were out, but there was enough light from the night outside through the windows to reveal her shape. He had changed into his pajamas, removed the sand he'd carried in onto the rug, washed his face and hands.

"Big rumpus outside," he said. He would have to tell her some of the truth. His legs were shaky. His breathing was still labored. "Heard a racket. Everybody running down the highway—bell-hop said there was a murder."

"No!"

"All kinds of excitement. Can't you sleep?"

"I'm not sleepy, just now."

Somehow he had to broach the subject of leaving, right away; induce her to see things his way.

"Listen, Rome." He stepped toward the bed. "I've an idea—something I want to ask you."

"No, Guy. I know what you want to ask."

He hesitated. "What do you mean?"

"You want us to leave here—tonight. Isn't that so? I think I understand how your mind works."

He stared at her through the darkness. A slow finger of sweat trickled from beneath his left arm. He dragged a hand across his face.

His voice was hoarse. "I don't get you."

"You get me perfectly, Guy. So damned perfectly." Her voice rose slightly, became more shrill. "I know about that girl, Guy—Janine Bonney. I know about Larkin. I know she's lying dead in that motel—murdered."

"Wait!" He cut her off sharply, moved for the light switch, flipped it on. The room flooded with overhead light. He had to see her, watch her expression.

"Well, Guy?"

It struck him like a brick across the face.

Rome was fully clothed, wearing a dark skirt and blouse, and leather sandals.

There were no bandages on her eyes. No dark glasses—nothing. Just her eyes—big and brown, shining in the light. Blinking at him. Clear and normal.

"Do I startle you, darling?"

He stared at her, more awed than shocked.

"Doctor Allmyre was right," she said softly, lying there. "I could see fine, the minute I took off the bandages. Really, it was inspiring. Not at all difficult to follow you and the girl down to her motel. Then, I watched you go for the liquor, Guy."

He heard himself croak, "What are you trying to say?"

She spoke harshly. "I killed her, you fool! I'm strong, you know that. I was a long distance swimmer. My arms are strong! I beat that bitch till she told me where the pictures and negatives were. When I got them, I killed her. I enjoyed every minute of it—every minute!" She ceased, breathing heavily. "I knew all about you. Everything—from the first night you slept with her. I'm not a damned fool, Guy."

His gaze lowered. He saw the sandy footprints leading across the rug from her private outside door. Just like his had been. Her footprints. It was true.

Her voice was soft now, composed. "I told you no one else would ever have you—that you would never leave me. You never will leave me, not now."

He whispered. "What are you going to do?"

"Do? Nothing—what should I do?"

"The negatives?"

"They're my security, Guy—a woman should have security—in case you ever have ideas again. Like wanting me to go swimming, or something like that. Do you think I didn't know what you wanted to happen? You're stupid, and obvious, darling—but, of course, I'll keep you around. It's old hat, Guy, but—if I die, there's a certain person who will open a certain envelope. Think about that."

He kept watching her and she said nothing. It was then he suddenly realized she wasn't looking straight at him. Her gaze was a shade off to the side. He moved quietly to the right, and she did not move her eyes at all—smiling, now, and staring at a spot of nothing on the wall.

"Rome—"

"Yes, Guy?"

Her eyes were vacant, sightless. The looked normal—they looked like eyes. But Rome wasn't seeing anything. It was a loud scream inside his head; the soap-operas, the TV, the horror of years to come.

He stumbled to the bed, then halted.

She heard the sound of his movement and looked directly at him. Hell tore through him. Those eyes looked so normal—yet. . . .

14.

"I almost have it down pat already," she said. "Yes, Guy—Allmyre was right. My sight started to fade on the way back here. I lost it completely, just as I reached the door. It lasted quite a while. But I'll never see again—I know that now. It's perfectly black out there. But you're here with me—in the dark, Guy. I'm blind—stone blind."

He stood there, rooted to the floor like a strange kind of tree. He stared at her mouth, and for the first time noticed that her lipstick was on cockeyed.

"You'll be my eyes, won't you, darling?"

He could not speak.

"Guy?"

"What?"

"I know it's late, but I'm not at all sleepy. I'd like you to read to me. The book's right there on the nightstand—the one about Alaska. That's so interesting! Page one hundred, darling. An easy number to remember, but you might have forgotten. If you please?"

He continued to stand there for a time.

Then, slowly, he walked over to the nightstand, picked up the book, and opened it.

Fore!

A service station operator in Indianapolis, Ind., captured a bandit who had just held him up by seizing a golf club and pretending it was a rifle. The robber, unable to tell the difference in the darkness, surrendered to the attendant and a police officer who arrived just as the bandit learned the truth.

by

AVRAM

DAVIDSON

THE HELPING HAND

Dr. Marmon knew the pills were worthless. His patients might die. But Dr. Marmon was really living. . . .

DR. HAROLD MARMON eyed the girl walking along the sidewalk. That was the proper way for a female to look—lots and lots of well-placed flesh—none of your reedlike, slender women for him. Dr. Marmon was a heavy man and it was only natural that his tastes also ran to things solid and tangible: Rich and heavy meals, expensive whiskey, long automobiles . . .

And well-stacked women. For a moment he thought of asking if the girl wanted a ride. "I am Doctor Harold Marmon, young lady, and I believe I am going in your direction. May I offer you—?" Obviously no common pick-up; the young ladies seldom said No to the offer of the distinguished gentleman with the expensive car and respected title. But now, as Marmon glanced at his watch, he decided regretfully that there wasn't time. The clinic was open every afternoon except Saturday and Sunday, and this was only Wednesday.

His lunch was digesting well, there was nothing like a good lunch to carry him through the busy afternoon until dinner, the main meal. He really let himself go for dinner, but lunch was light. Clear broth with marrow floating in it, baked pompano, a few squabs, a green salad, a good wine. And they really knew how to take care of him at Armando's. He passed a gaunt-looking red-brick building, glanced away with a grimace of distaste. Really, the old Skin and Cancer Hospital was an eye-sore; it should have been torn down years ago. And as for old Dr. Flecker, the scarecrow and croaker who presided over its shabby corridors and gloomy wards —would Flecker in a million years know how to order the correct wine at Armando's? The thought made Marmon smile, as he passed out of the downtown section, because the old troublemaker would never in a million years be able to afford a meal at Armando's.

Always poking and prying and complaining. Dog in the manger. . . .

The apartment houses were giving way to private

homes and wide lawns. Marmon felt at home here. Of course, there had been some objections (stimulated by Dr. Flecker) when he'd first set up the Clinic. But after a while the other residents realized that the Clinic was certainly no worse than the sanitarium which proceeded it—was, in fact, better. For one thing, the property had been run-down and now it was kept in excellent shape. For another, the old people in the sanitarium were always dying, disturbing the neighbors with the sight of hearses, and nobody died at the Clinic. Out-patients *only,* was Marmon's policy. So let Flecker croak and wail. The Hell with him.

Marmon came into the Clinic through his private entrance. It led to the inner office, not the one where he examined patients, but the one where he transacted personal business. Business was good. His investments were all doing well. If—by any chance—he should ever have to close the Clinic, he could live the rest of his life in opulent retirement.

He passed silently over the thick rug and sat at the huge desk, pressed a buzzer. Helen Exeter, his secretary, though she was wearing a nurse's uniform as she entered, was not a nurse. But neither, for that matter, were any of his other female employees, though they all wore white. It was expected. They didn't need nurses' training anyway, Dr. Marmon had his own method of training. It was no coincidence that most of his "nurses" were of the buxom type—not a thin or stringy one in the bunch.

"Well, what have we got this afternoon?" he asked Miss Exeter.

She handed him a heavy pile of cardboard folders. "You'd better see this one on top, first," she said. His eyes at once caught the tiny red "x" in an upper corner. He nodded, said he'd change and get started right away. A few minutes later he emerged into the outer office—a fine figure of a man, in the glow of health, an encouraging picture of everything a doctor should be: Complexion ruddy, teeth white, hair and mustache beautifully trimmed and picturesquely frosted with a touch of grey, white trousers—shoes—jacket, stethescope around his neck, reflector on his forehead. Nor did the faint odor he trailed hint of harsh and unpleasant medicines or disinfectants: it was an expensive men's cologne, bottled in Europe, Dr. Marmon used nothing else.

The waiting room in the Clinic was far different from the shabby and smelly one at Flecker's hospital. Here there were brightly-painted walls and new rugs (though not so thick as the one in the inner office) and flowers. The patients looked up eagerly as he entered—the Healer, the Saver. "Well, well," he called out heartily. "You all look pretty healthy to me! What are you wasting my time for, when I could be out on the golf-course?" There were some titters and smiles at this sally. "And how are you this lovely afternoon, Mrs. Holmar?" he boomed, pausing in front of a woman with a puffy, ill-tempered face.

"Oh, much better, Doctor," she gushed. This didn't surprise Marmon, as he had never thought she was ill, in the first place—unless you count hypochondria as an illness. "I ate a whole soft-boiled egg and a piece of buttered toast for my breakfast. First time in months I've been able to hold anything—"

"There, isn't that wonderful," he cut into her speech. "It just goes to show what following the Marmon Method can do! And how are *you* feeling, Mr. Whupman, hmmm?" Mr. Whupman shook his head querulously, said he wasn't feeling well at all. No one would have thought from the benevolent, concerned expression on the doctor's face that he could cheerfully have strangled old Whupman where he sat. Instead he said, in the tone of one explaining the obvious and just a bit disappointed that it needs explaining, "Well, you know . . . it's always darker just before the dawn . . . and very, very often, we've got to get worse before we can get better. Isn't that right?" he appealed to the others. They nodded and murmured their agreement. That was Logic: that was a familiar word.

"After all," Marmon challenged the old man, who already looked as if he regretted his remark, "how'd you feel if you'd gone instead to some quack, some butcher of a surgeon, hey? Think you'd be feeling as well as you do now, if he'd cut you open and took you apart? Ask Mrs. Holnar, *she'll* tell you." No need to say just what, in particular, Mrs. Holmar was supposed to tell him, she took the cue without even realizing it had been given. As Marmon left the waiting room he heard her telling Whupman—and the rest of the captive audience—of what wonders The Doctor had wrought...when she first came she was nothing but skin and bones . . .

Not, he reflected, closing the door, that she was anything else even now. But, as long as she paid—He looked at the name on the folder he held in his hand, the one with the little red x-mark on it. Aurelia Clegorn (Miss), aged 64. It wouldn't take long. His face, as he entered the small room where Helen Exeter had shunted the first patient, was grave, but not gloomy. The two women were whispering as he came in, their faces, as they looked up, showed them to be sisters. But whereas one face was merely haggard grey with worry and from sleeplessness, the other was yellow and gaunt from wasting illness and approaching death.

Marmon introduced himself. "The first thing I want to tell you," he said next, "is this: Never feel discouraged." Miss Aurelia Clegorn licked her bluish lips, nodded eagerly and swallowed. He could trace the progress of that swallow along every inch of her shrunken throat. "Now, I have carefully examined the x-rays and blood-test reports, and I am going recommend a very fine doctor to you."

"But—Dr. Marmon—" the sister said, disturbed. "We came to consult *you*—we've heard such mar-

velous stories. And we've *seen* other doctors."

Yes, Marmon thought, and they told Aurelia to make her will. And now you've come to die on my doorstep. But you won't do it.

Aloud, he said, "If I were the kind of man who is interested only in money, I could string you along with some course of treatment, yes. But I recognize that the precise nature of your condition is one of those rare cases which cannot be treated by the Marmon Method. Now, the man who can help you is Dr. Joseph Flecker, at the hospital on East Grant Street. He is an expert in your kind of case. He'll have you on your feet in no time. I'm glad that you came to me because it enables me to recommend him to you." Fletcher would burst a vein, of course, but then it would be up to him to break the sad news and send the Clegorn sisters back wherever the hell they came from. And it gave Marmon another reason to say, as he often did, that *he* made no outrageous claim of being able to cure everyone; that whenever he saw a case he felt would respond better to orthodox medical care, he so informed them.

"That means that we get our deposit back, doesn't it, Doctor?"

What a chance! Smiling encouragingly, he advised them to see his secretary. Helen would ease them out and into a taxi before they even noticed their hands were still empty . . . Goodbye, ladies. And remember: Never Despair!

Now, who was next? Whupman. Hmm. Whupman wasn't responding. Maybe he wasn't a hypochondriac like Holmar, after all. Maybe he really did have cancer. In that case—"Well, Mr. Whupman, I've gone over your reports, and I want to tell you—I am *happy* to tell you—that, just as I suggested before, you very definitely are getting better. The feelings you mention are caused by the new, living tissues pushing and thrusting their way in and displacing the old, sick, worn-out tissues. You see?"

And Whupman, listening to this gibberish, nodded his foolish old head with feeble eagerness. "In fact," Marmon went on, "you've made so much progress that I'm going to send you home."

The old man, not grasping this, asked, "Back to my hotel?"

"No-ho-ho! Back to your home in, um, Pennsylvania, isn't it?" Far enough away from here. "Now, I won't deceive you, sir. You are far from being completely cured. You must be very careful of your health. No drinking or smoking. Early to bed. Stay away from meat and tomatoes. Meat and tomatoes are poisonous to you." The old man nodded and nodded, drinking it all in. "And, *most* important of all: Continue taking your medications." Funny how "medications" impressed them more than medicine. Well, the world was full of fools. Fortunately for Dr. Harold Marmon. No need to inform Whupman that his "medications" would arrive by express instead of by mail. It would be embarrassing to have to explain that the Post Office Department had banned their shipment by mail—damn them, anyway! That was more of Flecker's doings. Thinking of Flecker, Dr. Marmon's face grew bitter.

How about that time he'd cornered him downtown? Why, if he wasn't such an old man Marmon would have hit him! "I can understand a man's being a crook, Marmon," Flecker had ranted. "I can understand his being a traitor, or a pimp. But I can*not* understand anyone being so cold and corrupt and calloused as to become a cancer quack!"

But the Clinic's owner had stood right up to him. "I have in my files, open to your inspection, over thousands of letters from grateful people whom I've cured of cancer," he said, stoutly.

Flecker's sour old face had creased in anger. "Cured them? Why, dammit, if they claim you 'cured' them, then they never had cancer in the first place! I received a letter only today from a physician in Ohio, reporting the death of a woman who'd crept home to die after being treated by you."

Well, she most probably would have died anyway. But aloud Marmon merely said, "I don't claim to be omnipotent. Do I understand that none of *your* patients ever die?" Of course, he had no reply to that. Just went away to stir up more trouble. Marmon had been in court more than once as a result of the trouble-making activities of the medical profession. He got off, of course. In each case he had put his star exhibit on the stand: Eve Cholchak. Eve had been to an M.D. before she came to him, had been certified by her local hospital as suffering from cancer. His lawyer made the most of that.

"Do you claim, Dr. Flecker, that the report of the Ann Arbor Hospital was wrong—that Miss Cholchak did *not* have cancer?"

"No. No, I concede that she did."

"And do you deny that she does *not* have it now, after treatment by Dr. Marmon?"

He'd wiggled, then! "Well, I agree that she does seem cured . . . but I do deny that Marmon had anything to do with it. Miss Colchak's is a case of what we call 'spontaneous remission'. In other words, she got better because her condition—well, it's one of those miracles we can't explain—she just got better without being treated, that's all. It happens very rarely, of course."

But no one was buying that. She had cancer. Marmon treated her. Now she was cured. Hence—Marmon cured her. The resultant wave of patients more than paid his legal costs. A hundred times more. Maybe Fletcher would realize he couldn't win, and lay off. Let him stick to his charity patients in the crummy old Skin and Cancer Hospital on East Grant, and leave Marmon alone with his Clinic, his Cadillac, his bank accounts, well-filled safety-deposit boxes, investments, real estate, oil-leases. Everybody had to die, didn't they? No one forced the patients to come to Marmon, did they? Maybe he *did* cure lots of people—maybe the "medica-

tions" *were* of some use. Could they prove they weren't? The regular doctors damn sure wouldn't allow any of their own patients to submit to the Marmon method, so—well, we'll never really know, will we? In the meanwhile: look out for Number One. To wit, Harold Marmon. "Doctor" Harold Marmon.

Still, that remark about preferring a pimp to him still rankled.

The afternoon wore on in it's usual dull manner. Then—about five o'clock—just before he generally paused for a cup of coffee (custom blended and ground) with a shot of Martinique "rhum" in it, as a pick-me up—then it happened.

He went into one of the small examining rooms, and there She was. Oh, yes, there was a grey-haired woman there, too. Fat. No doubt in twenty-five years the girl would look the same, but who was concerned about twenty-five years from now? Or even five, for that matter.

It was the same girl he'd eyed on the street when he was coming back from lunch. Close-up, she looked even better: Dark hair, good complexion, lovely legs, and gorgeous breasts. In fact, he let his eyes rest just a second too long on the well-filled blouse. The pink cheeks grew pinker. Quickly, but without giving the appearance of haste, Marmon said to the girl, "Well, you certainly don't look sick."

It worked. She at once forgot his too-frank glance, and said, "Oh, Doctor, it's not me—it's Aunt Grace, here." Her clear contralto voice (she had the chest for it, all right!) rang in his ears for only a second. Aunt Grace broke into tears.

"Oh, it's hopeless," she wept. "It's hopeless! I feel it. There's no hope."

The woman didn't look too bad. Marmon put her down as a hysteric. Change of life, perhaps, had aggravated her natural tendencies. One day, no doubt, she began to brood, wound up convincing herself she had cancer. A common menopausal crochet. And a very profitable one to him.

He sat down and began to pat her hands. "Nonsense, my dear. In the healing hands of a skilled physician, no case is hopeless. I have in my files over one thousand letters—" And so on. Aunt Grace lapped it up. So did her niece, whose name, he soon found out, was Ellen. Dr. Marmon fancied himself, not as "a quick worker," where women were concerned, but as one who worked with the slow assurance born of long practice.

"Bring your aunt in tomorrow," he said to Ellen. "She's going to be all right." And his look was only that of a kindly middle-aged doctor for a dutiful niece.

In the next few days he learned more about her. Aunt Grace and Uncle Bob had raised her and her brothers. They were all in the Navy now, making a career out of it. Uncle Bob was dead, and Ellen had left her job to stay with Aunt Grace, who hadn't felt well this past year. Then, on Monday, she took him aside.

"Doctor," she said, "about the money—"

"If I'd wanted to make *money,* I'd have gone into the oil business." And he chuckled, as if the idea of his wanting money was really too funny.

She smiled, but continued. "Yes, but—I mean—you have your expenses."

He sighed. "That's true, my dear, and very heavy ones they are. The Clinic, you know, doesn't receive a penny of the public funds. Professional jealousy—"

Ellen said, hesitantly, "I thought perhaps I could work here and help pay for Aunt Grace. I can type, take dictation."

He looked into her large, dark, eyes, and nodded slowly.

"I have never yet turned a patient away from my door. I'm sure we'll be able to work something out."

The big eyes went moist. "Oh—Doctor! I don't know how . . . I mean, to thank—"

I'll tell you, by and by, he thought. He smiled indulgently. And then invited her to dinner. Armando's put on a fine performance, from the bowing and flourishing which greeted their entrance, right down to the champagne. Ellen, whose dates had evidently never risen to more than pizza or chop suey, had to struggle to keep her eyes in their sockets. She had a damned good appetite, too, but Marmon didn't mind that. He liked a woman who could keep pace with him—at the table, as well as elsewhere. And certainly the girl couldn't keep those lovely curves in the right places on a diet of black coffee and dry toast.

He didn't make the mistake of telling her that his wife was no good and didn't understand him.

"My wife," he said, "is a fine, good woman." Oddly enough, this was a damned lie—his wife was a lush with a vile temper. "It breaks my heart to be apart from her, but she wants to be in California, where her family lives." He sighed deeply, shook his head. His wife's only "family," her brother Gus, was doing twenty-years to life in the Montana State Pen.

"What an ironic thing," he mourned, "that I, a physician, should be unable to cure my own wife. Crippled for life. Automobile accident. Terrible thing." The tears came again to Ellen's eyes. The plain fact was that Marmon's wife lived in Long Beach on an allowance of $200 a week as long as she stayed there, and she couldn't sue for more because she was supporting her *de facto* husband, a "retired" teamfitter, than which no better grounds existed for Marmon's getting a divorce free from alimony. He just didn't care to bother.

"Oh, how sad," sniffled Ella.

On the second date he declared his hopeless love for her, and she cried in his arms. On the third date he took her up to see the Clinic. She didn't bother to point out that she was seeing it several times a

week, nor did he.

He also showed her his private office, and poured her one of the sweet, sticky liqueurs which women love. Marmon had Scotch, himself. He didn't exactly "show" her the office's largest piece of furniture, after the huge desk: a wide couch with deep cushions and bouncy springs, but then, she was already sitting on it. After her third drink he left the edge of the desk, where he'd been sitting, and sat down next to her. It was his opinion that all women were the same, only that some unhooked behind, and some in front.

Ellen, he sooned learned, unhooked in front. Of course they had to go all through the traditional ritual of *I-love you* and *I-suppose it-can't-be-wrong-if-we-really-love-each-other;* but Ella really meant it and Marmon regarded it as a reasonable price of admission. Her skin was very smooth, nothing was false, nothing was forced.

Dr. Marmon didn't recall where he had ever spent a more pleasant evening.

He spent quite a few more of them, meanwhile dousing Aunt Grace with capsules which, if they didn't do her any good, could not (in his opinion) do her any harm.

No good thing lasts forever. He had a date with Ellen to see a play—the original New York company was touring in it—and she didn't show up. He called the lodging house where she and Aunt Grace had been staying. The conversation with the landlady was brief and unsatisfactory. "They left and they won't be back." "Didn't they leave any forwarding address?" "Yes, but I ain't going to give it to you. Told me not to." And she hung up. Marmon cursed. What could it have been? Regrets on the part of Ellen? A fresh attack of Aunt Grace's hysteria? He shrugged.

In the months which followed Marmon all but forgot about Ellen.

Late one night after the trainee had finally departed, Dr. Marmon went for a stroll about the grounds of the clinic. The evening's activities had stimulated rather than subdued him. He lit one of his prime Havanas and walked along the gravel paths between his flower-beds. There was no moon, and it took a moment or so before he realized that a man was standing in the path—standing as if he was waiting.

"What are you doing here?" Marmon demanded. "Who are you?"

In the faint glow of a distant street-lamp he saw that the man was young. He seemed a rather large young man.

"My name is Flores," he said. "I'm Ellen's brother Bob. You *do* remember Ellen, don't you—doctor?"

"What do you want here?" Marmon repeated.

"I'm home from the Navy on emergency leave," Bob Flores went on. "Want to know how come? I'll tell ya. Aunt Grace's funeral was the day before yesterday. My two brothers couldn't make it, but I made it. Aunt Grace had a lot of pain, my sister told me. If she'd gone to a regular doctor instead of to a quack like you, maybe she'd be alive today."

Marmon said, "And maybe not." He felt he could handle Bob Flores. Age was against him, but he knew a trick or two—

"And maybe not," repeated the sailor. "But that wasn't all Ellen told me. You must of had yourself quite a ball with her, didn't you, you dirty—"

Bob Flores nodded his head. The shadows alongside the flower-bed detached themselves from the darkness and moved into the pool of light. "My brothers," said Bob. "Tom and Ed. Like I said, they couldn't make the funeral, but they got in last night.

"The hell with all this talking," one of them interrupted. Marmon never did learn if it was Tom *or* Ed. He started for Marmon, who put up his guard. The other brother got him in the side of the head, he went down on his knees, bent over, and Bob kicked him in the teeth. The teeth gave . . .

Sometimes they were at him one at a time, sometimes from both sides, and sometimes all three of them worked on him at once. He tried to call again for the help which hadn't come at his previous cries, but this time the blood gurgled in his battered throat. He rose on one elbow, then fell.

There was a new reporter on the *Courier,* the local paper, and when the editor told him to see the D.A. about the Marmon case he had to think twice to recall it.

"Marmon?" he repeated. "Mar—Oh, yeah. The cancer quack those three swabbies beat up. Yeah. Okay—anything in particular you want me to ask the D.A. about the case?"

The editor said yes, there was. "Ask him if he's really interested in prosecuting the case or if he's going to grant the defense another postponement. You see," he explained, "Marmon is just about the only witness."

"Yeah, but he'll testify, won't he?"

The editor shrugged. "Not if they continue putting the trial off . . . they had to keep operating . . . . that beating he took—that's what began it. No point in operating any more."

But the reporter was still puzzled. "Why not?" he asked. "Began what?"

"Why don't you read up on these cases? You must be the only one in town who doesn't know. And listen—while you're on your way back from the D.A.'s, stop off and see Doctor Flecker. Marmon," he explained, "is in the incurables' wing at the Skin and Cancer Hospital."

BE A MAN!

by TALMAGE POWELL

Coe's father kept telling Coe to be a man. Then Coe found out just what his father meant. . . .

LITTLE COE ran until the beating of his heart filled his head and the breath was a sharp pain in his lungs.

He scrambled across the dusty, rocky gully and went reeling down the path that led beneath the tall pines and swinging wild grape vines.

It was cool here, with the hot summer sun shut away. The heavy carpet of fallen pine needles was soft beneath the horny callouses of his bare feet.

He was a thin youngster of eleven years. He had long arms and hands. The bones in his face were delicate and fine. Like his snivelling mother's, Big Coe always said. Little Coe's skin was very fair, dusted with freckles, and his cheeks and nose were peeling from sunburn. The corner of his mouth was clotted with dried blood. His lower lip was swelling a little and the taste of the blood was hot and sickening in his throat.

Ahead was a depression carved by nature, and there a crystal clear spring, sheltered by huge moss-grown stones, gurgled to the surface.

Little Coe fell full length beside the spring. He wiped his face with the tattered cuff of his faded blue denim shirt. Then he lowered his hot face to the kindness of the water.

The water's chill was sharp, like the touch of cold, brittle metal. He drank until curds formed in his convulsing stomach and dipped his matted yellow hair into the spring. Big Coe cut his hair four times a year and the next cutting was due in a week; and it was like wearing a blanket on the head. Little Coe felt the water go seeping through his hair until it bit his scalp.

He sat up at last, water running around his ears and down his neck to mingle with the sweat blackening his shirt and faded overalls.

He was feeling better now. His mouth didn't hurt so much. But a different fear came to him. It was an old, old fear. He couldn't remember when it hadn't been a part of him, tucked in a dark, terrible place inside of him.

He sat with the dark place opening and the fear stealing out through him. I won't go home, he thought. I'll run away. I could get a job, or steal, or beg. I purely can't go home.

His soft, quizzical blue eyes deepened until they were haunted mirrors. The corner of his mouth began to twitch.

I'd get caught. I'd get sent back home. And that would be worse than ever.

If'n I could just die . . .

A twig snapped behind him, and Little Coe whirled, crouched. Froze.

Big Coe had entered the glade. He stood looking at the boy a moment. He was called Big Coe by all the neighboring mountain people. He was a big man in a country of big men. His body, clothed in jeans and brogans and blue shirt, suggested the qualities of a bull. His face was a heavy mass of meat hacked by a hurried sculptor's hand. His eyes were heavy-lidded and narrowed as he looked at Little Coe.

"Where you been, boy?"

"To—see if the chinkapins beyond the holler are ripe."

"Are they?"

"Yes, pa."

"Did you get some?"

"No, pa."

The big man took a few steps toward the quaking boy. The heavy fingers touched the boy's chin.

"You got a bust on the mouth, boy."

"Pa, I . . ."

"How'd you get it?"

"I—I fell down, pa."

The gray eyes held Little Coe in the rigid grip of terror. "You're a liar, boy. I can tell."

Little Coe's mind formed a wish of despair. Please, ma, come to the spring for a bucket of water.

He wanted to throw a wild glance over his shoulder. The weather-browned, clapboard house was on the slope, just two hundred yards from the spring. It could be glimpsed through the foliage of pines and green-leafed laurel. Maybe he would see her coming out of the house, thin and bent, a bucket in her hand. He wanted her to come so much that the wish simply had to come true.

And yet a part of him never wanted her to come. She was the only frail shelter Little Coe had ever had. She had known Big Coe's iron hand far longer than Little Coe. It had left its mark upon her, and each time she stood between him and Big Coe, she paid. It was one way Big Coe had of measuring himself as a Man, as the master of his house.

And so Little Coe fought the wish until it died in his mind.

She must not come.

Please don't let her come.

"I'm waiting, boy," Big Coe said.

"Pa, I . . ."

"Is that all you can say. You yellow, soft-livered little snake, can't you get no words out?"

"I went about the chinkapins, pa."

"And you didn't get none. A bust on the mouth, instead. Who, boy? Who run you off from them chinkapins?"

"Nobody, pa, I . . ." Little Coe's teeth snapped together and his head jerked on his shoulders as Big Coe's palm struck him across the cheek. He could feel the hot sting of the blow. For a second or two, the world was a black nothing. Only the pain and fear and terrible hate were real.

"You're fooling with a man, boy," Big Coe said. "Now don't give me none of that sissy lip. Who chased you from that chinkapin patch?"

"Josh Billings, pa," Little Coe said dully.

"And you let him do it?"

"Only after he knocked me down and kicked me in the ribs, pa. I stood up to him till then, I swear I did, pa."

Big Coe grunted. His lips were thin across his heavy, square, yellowed teeth. He spat on the ground.

"Come on, boy."

Little Coe's throat worked. "Pa, there really ain't many chinkapins this year."

"Come on," I said. "Ain't nobody taking them nuts from us."

Big Coe grabbed the collar of Little Coe's shirt and shoved the boy forward. Little Coe stumbled.

"Stay on your feet, boy. Us Simpsons always stay on our feet. Nobody takes nothing from us."

Little Coe wanted to ask Big Coe about the time Henry Hyder had taken the knife off Big Coe in the beer joint in town. Henry had made Big Coe get on his knees and apologize. But Little Coe knew to keep his mouth shut about that.

With every beat of his heart a pulsation of sickness, Little Coe retraced his steps. Back across the gully. Up the long, long hillside so hot in the sun of late mountain summer.

Along the path that led through the timber. And at last he was standing trembling at the head of the meadow, Big Coe behind him.

The meadow was long, waist high in grass. It was surrounded by the serene beauty of the mountains, canopied by a sky of light blue velvet. But Little Coe saw none of that. He could only stare ahead along the slope to the chinkapin bushes a hundred yards away. Once, Little Coe had heard, the chestnut-like, sweet little nuts had been plentiful in the mountains. But a blight had come and today, in Little Coe's lifetime, the chinkapins were rare delicacies to be prized, to be roasted or boiled and eaten to the last crumb of sweet white meat.

The whole of the long hillside looked devoid of life and Little Coe's heart quickened with hope. Then came a rustling of bushes and Josh Billings came into view dragging a gunny sack. He was picking up the chinkapins, burrs and all. He would pop the burrs and remove the nuts when he carried the sack home.

Little Coe felt his knees go to water. He looked at Big Coe's face and a constriction caught his throat. Big Coe was looking at Josh with a smile of strange pleasure on his heavy face. He looked at Josh's long arms and heavy shoulders, big for a boy of thirteen. And then he looked at Little Coe and the expression on Big Coe's face deepened.

"Go get him, boy."

"Pa, I . . ."

"You heard me," Big Coe said softly.

Little Coe swallowed and took a step forward. He felt very old. He felt as if each of his eleven years had been a century, a limitless suspension of time clouded by the heavy shadow of his father's presence. Long ago he'd accepted the fact that he was a yellow weakling, not big and brave and tough as Big Coe had been at his age.

He knew he couldn't whip Josh Billings.

He was going to have to take a beating.

Josh heard Little Coe's approach and glanced up. Josh had a flat expressionless face and muddy-colored eyes. He was red-headed, and his red eyebrows grew together over the bridge of his nose.

Josh stood with the sack clutched in one hand, looking from Little Coe to Big Coe.

Little Coe cleared his throat. "You give me back my chinkapins, Josh. I'm here to take them."

Josh kept his attention centered on Big Coe, and when it became apparent that Big Coe was going to make no move, Josh said, "Come and take them, you little rabbit."

Little Coe forced himself to move closer to Josh. He stood with his hands balled into fists. "I mean it now, Josh!" To him, his voice sounded thin as it made a forlorn crack in the silence of the summer day.

"Aw, get the hell out of here," Josh said, "before I chew you up and spit you out for hound dog bait."

Little Coe gave a last look over his shoulder. He couldn't retreat. Big Coe was watching the scene with glistening eyes.

Little Coe's lip began to tremble and he bit down on it, hard. He drew desperately on his courage and reached for the gunny sack. Josh hit him in the mouth, right where he had hit Little Coe before.

The pain was a hot flash exploding behind Little Coe's skull. He lashed out blindly. He felt his knuckles smash against yielding flesh and was surprised to hear Josh scream in rage and pain.

Josh bore in on him, swinging blindly. Their fighting was furious and silent. Little Coe beat at his tormentor with all his strength. He was forced back. Josh knocked him down, kicked him in the stomach, and backed up a few steps. He stood looking at Little Coe. His breath was coming fast and there was a trickle of blood seeping from Josh's nose.

Little Coe pulled himself away from Josh. His strength was gone. His moment of high courage and wrath was slipping away from him. He was puking sick, and he looked up at Big Coe and said, "Pa, I . . ."

Big Coe grabbed his overalls gallus and jerked Little Coe to his feet.

"You get in there and whip him—or I'll whip you," Big Coe said.

Josh was wiping his nose on the back of his hand. He made no advance, but when Big Coe shoved Little Coe toward him, Josh's fists lashed out again.

Little Coe tried to cover his face with his arms. The driving fists numbed his forearms, knocked them aside. The hard knuckles smashed his cheeks, his jaw. He was down again. Gasping against the grass. His body hot and cold at the same moment.

Sun, sky, clouds, trees, everything about the day melted into an unreal haze. Little Coe felt big hands on him once more. The hands were pulling him to his feet. A deep, rough voice was in his ear. "You whip him, or you'll get it good!"

One of the heavy hands was thrusting a hard heavy object into Little Coe's hand.

A stone.

A flat, murderous stone.

Little Coe obeyed the heavy, hard hands and went in swinging.

He felt the sweep of the stone halted. Halted so hard it jarred his entire arm. He heard a sound like a pebble being dropped in mud.

And then he stood crouched, gasping for breath, peering hard through the haze.

He began to make out details.

Josh lay on the ground before him. There was a ragged hole in Josh's temple, and the hole was spilling grayish blood.

Little Coe tried to speak. A shiver passed over him as he saw the way Josh was looking straight

into the rays of the blinding sun. Seeing nothing.

Little Coe turned his eyes away. He looked at Big Coe, and he was unable to look away. After several seconds, even the thought of Josh was no longer the focal point of his mind.

The big man who touted his own bravery stood as if rooted to the hillside. He stared at the dead boy. He was trembling all over. His eyes bulged. His face was gray, his mouth slack.

Little Coe had never seen such a craven, shrinking thing in his whole life, not even in a cur dog.

He moved up to Big Coe and dropped the bloody stone at Big Coe's feet. Big Coe looked at him and made a whimpering sound in his throat.

Little Coe set off across the hillside. Like little bombs, silent words were bursting in his mind. Words to be said to the sheriff. To the whole countryside. *Pa come up while Josh was picking on me and Pa picked up that rock and popped Josh with it and I don't reckon he meant to kill Josh but Josh fell down and Pa was so stricken he purely couldn't move.*

It wasn't far from the truth, just stretching the truth a mite. Little Coe thought. And even if the sheriff didn't believe him, Josh's folks would. He knew the Billingses very well, and he knew their way of dealing with a situation like this.

As he turned down the path, Little Coe ran very lightly.

He ran as if small, gay wings were on his eager feet.

Clean Haul

L. S. Cole, motel owner at Dallas, Tex., told police that after a couple left one morning the following items were missing: Two lamps, two chairs, a wall rack, two trays, bed clothing, towels, pillow slips and the bathroom fixtures. The kitchen sink was undisturbed.

Mistaken Identity

Arrested for stabbing a young woman in Yarmouth, England, Vincent E. Halliday apologized. "I'm very sorry," he explained. "I thought the woman was my wife."

Toy Department

Earl (Windmill) Gray, a Boston, Mass., boxer, was placed on three years probation after he pleaded guilty of carrying and firing a gun without a permit. "I wouldn't harm anybody," he told the judge. "I think of a gun as a yo-yo, just something to play around with."

Robbery — With Taste

A nonchalant thief in Oakland, Calif., got the day's receipts from a liquor store cash register, then became a customer. Ordering a bottle of bonded whiskey and several of the store's best cigars, he tossed $10 to the startled clerk and told him to keep the change.

And a stranger described as handsome entered a Chicago dress shop and asked Mrs. Celia Friedkin to select a trousseau for his fiancee. As the clerk packaged a coat, three dresses and lacy lingerie, he outlined plans for his "beautiful, candlelight wedding." Then he drew a gun and fled with the $200 trousseau.

Marchand's life was practically perfect. All he had to do to improve it was kill. . . .

HOOKED

A Novelette

by

ROBERT TURNER

THE fishing camp was down a rutted dirt road, about five hundred yards off the highway. Marchand had never been there before. It wasn't quite the way he had visualized it; not rundown and dirty, at all. It was really quite a place, well kept and prosperous looking, and Marchand could see how, living here, having a business like that, a man who wasn't too ambitious, didn't want too much out of life, the outdoor type who liked boats and water and people who went in for fishing, could be quite happy with it.

First there was a small, store-like building, with a sign over it that said you could buy all kinds of bait and rent tackle there and that they served food, beer and soft drinks. Behind that, closer to the water, was the house. It was a fairly new, modern looking house, in the $15,000 class. At the lake's edge there was a small pier and a half dozen trim, freshly painted small boats suitable for rowing or attaching an outboard.

Marchand parked the shiny new Cad Eldorado convertible near the store and settled back comfortably in the seat to wait. He'd gotten out here a little early, about fifteen minutes before Gladys had told him to be there.

In a few minutes a girl came out of the store, walked toward the car. She was barefoot and she wore jeans and a blue work shirt, the tails of it out and tied in a knot in front, baring her midriff and accentuating the most beautiful development Marchand had ever seen on a woman. He could hardly believe his eyes as he watched her walk toward the car. The jeans fitted her long, finely carved legs as though she'd been born in them.

For a moment, Marchand was almost afraid to look at her face. She had to be a hag in the face department, he told himself; there had to be *some* catch to a girl with a body like that being stuck way out here in the sticks.

But there wasn't. Under a smartly coiffed cap of sun-glistening, mahogany red, softly waved hair, was the most strikingly beautiful face Marchand had ever seen. The eyes were widely set and unbelievably dark and liquid looking under their long, thick, spiked lashes. The brows were delicately winged. Under a small, saucily tilted nose, her mouth was full and moistly pouting, made for kissing.

Just before she reached the car, she smiled and her teeth were tiny and so even and white the smile almost blinded Marchand. He had had his share of lovely women in his twenty-seven years, showgirls and models some of them, but he'd never had one hit him like this at first sight. He thought it had something to do with the clean, wholesome, unspoiled look about her. Whatever it was, she had him flipping. He felt himself flushing and getting nervous and full in the throat like some silly school boy.

"Hi," she said. "Mrs. Marchand is still out on the lake but I imagine they'll be in pretty soon. You can wait out here or come on inside, if you like and have some coffee or a beer or something." Her voice was low and throaty, yet completely feminine.

Somehow, Marchand got words out without stammering, without his voice breaking with emotion; he never knew how.

"So you're a mind reader, as well as being beautiful," he said.

She laughed. "Not exactly. I recognized the car." She was close to it now and she trailed her fingers, lightly, lovingly along the glittering chrome trim. "How could I miss?"

"You like this buggy, huh?"

She shook her head, wonderingly. "It's almost too much to believe that people own things like this." Then she looked up at him. "I didn't know Mrs. Marchand had a son."

"She doesn't." He grinned crookedly at her. "I happen to be her husband."

"Oh!" She looked quickly away, flustered. "I—I'm sorry."

"Forget it. It happens all the time. It's what I get for marrying a woman almost twice my age."

"Mrs. Marchand's very nice," she said. "She's sweet."

"Yeah?"

"Well, I think she is. She's very nice to us."

"You old man Foster's daughter or do you just work here?"

"I'm his daughter. I'm Nila. I'm just home during the summer. I go to State."

"Oh."

"Oh, college is all right."

"Sure, except with a girl like you, it's a waste of time."

"What do you mean a girl like me?" her eyes flashed. "Just because my father runs a fishing camp here in Florida doesn't mean I intend to spend *my* life here, either, just because *he* goes for it."

"I didn't mean that," he said. "What I meant was, a girl with your looks doesn't need a fancy education to make out. You should be in New York or Chicago or L. A., right now, knocking down fifty an hour as a model, maybe working in TV, even the movies."

"Uh-huh," she said. "Listen, Mr. Marchand, girls with good features and a nice shape are a dime a dozen in those places. I know what the score is. Maybe if I had a lot of money to pay for a big time photographer for glamor shots, for a press agent, for the works in a high priced beauty salon once a week, for the kind of clothes it takes, for a top voice and drama coach. Without those things it'd be a rat race just like anything else."

"You shouldn't have any trouble getting somebody to finance you."

"That's a nice, polite word for it," she said. She saw him staring at the bulging front of her blouse. Her voice froze a little. "You mean somebody like you, Mr. Marchand?"

He looked up at her eyes again. They stared right back at him, steadily, almost defiantly. "Ray," he said.

"What?"

"My first name. Ray. Never mind the Mr. Marchand bit. I feel old enough, being married to a woman like Gladys, without that."

"Well, Ray, then," she said. "I'm sorry, Ray, but sometimes I get a little tired of guys coming in here and giving me the dumb little country girl treatment."

"Include me out of that group. I wasn't speaking for myself. Hell, Nila, I haven't got a cent of my own. My wife's the one with the rocks."

She started to say something but then, from the lake, there came faintly the sound of an outboard motor. They both looked out toward the lake and saw a boat, about a quarter mile out, heading in.

"Here comes your wife, now. I'll see you. I'd better get back inside. My father likes to have hot

coffee waiting for him when he gets back."

He watched her walk away from the car. The view was even better from the back. Because the swing of her full-rounded, tight-jeaned hips was natural and not overdone, it was twice as provocative. Watching her, Marchand felt his pulse begin to pound and his head felt hot and swollen with the blood beating through it.

"Nila!" he called out.

She stopped and half turned around, the partway twist of her body accentuating its ripely curved beauty.

"I'll be out here again," he told her. "I think I could get to like this fishing routine. I'd need a guide to take me out in a boat, though; I'm a real square landlubber. You ever available?"

"Sometimes," she said and went on into the store.

2.

Through the windshield of the car he watched his wife, Gladys, and old man Foster, who owned the camp, tie-up the boat. Then Gladys, carrying a string of several bass, all of them over three pounds, and a couple of plump crappies, walked up from the dock. Behind her, carrying the outboard motor, was Pops Foster.

They made a good pair, those two, Marchand decided, his wife, a little plumpish but generally well preserved for a woman in her fifties and Foster, about the same age but not looking it with his big, lean, rawboned body; except for the iron gray hair at the temples and a ruggedly lined face. He watched Gladys look back at Foster and jabber something so that both of them laughed.

"What the hell have they got to be so damned happy about?" he asked. "Two thirds of their dull lives already shot and they gambol about, yakking and yokking it up like school kids. Just because they've been out in a dinky boat for a few hours, throwing out a silly plug and reeling it in; out and in and if they're lucky, a couple of stupid, slimy, smelly fish get suckered into snapping at the thing? Is that it? I don't get it. . . . Now, maybe a fishing party, out on the Gulf, in a fifty foot cabin cruiser, with lots of good booze and a couple of dollies along. . . ."

Gladys came up to the car and said, "Hi, Sweetie," and took the fish around to put in the trunk compartment. Then she came back and got into the car next to him.

"Been waiting long?" she said.

"Hours," he lied.

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize we were late, but Floyd—Mr. Foster—he got to telling me about going for muskies up in Michigan and the time just went by."

She leaned toward him, one hand on his shoulder, her lips puckered. "You were sweet to get the car fixed and run out here for me. Give Momma a kiss."

He was looking past her bent-forward head toward the Fishing Camp store and he saw Nila standing there talking to her father, only Nila was looking toward the car, at him and Gladys and she could see inside, he knew.

"Oh, come on," he told Gladys. "Act your age, will you?"

She looked up and saw the directon of his gaze and turned and looked the same way. "Oh, I see," she said. "You've met Nila. Cute-looking child, isn't she?"

"Yes," he said. "She's a walking, breathing doll. She's got me nuts, just looking at her."

Gladys laughed, heartily. "You!" she said. "I should have known you'd really go for that. I meant to tell you about her and watch you come out here, sniffing around, just for kicks."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, Buster, Nila Foster isn't one of those Tampa B-girls or peelers you're so fond of. You not only wouldn't get to first base; you wouldn't even get a turn at bat, with her. That's strictly hands off, honey, if I've ever seen it and it's going to stay that way until some court clerk hands her the piece of paper that gives her the right to some guy's name."

"Is that so? You know what I think, Gladys?" he said. She was getting under his skin so that he had to control his voice. "I think you're just trying to discourage me because you're afraid I might really go for something like that. Then you'd lose me."

Gladys stretched her plumpish, dungareed legs out under the dash and lit a cigarette. She blew smoke. "Ray," she said, "I thought we understood each other better than that. I couldn't lose you for a million babes like Nila; not for more than an hour at a time. You know why, don't you?"

"No, I don't. I know that *you* think you know why. How do you know I'm not sick and tired of being a rich old woman's husband? How do you know I don't want out?"

"Now, Ray, dear," she said, as though reproving a child. "You know not many things make me sore, but you're starting to get close. How would you like your allowance cut off for a week again?"

He told her what she could do with her allowance and smashed down on the gas pedal. The big Cad leaped forward like a live thing. In no time the speedometer was registering over ninety.

Sitting a little rigidly, now, Gladys said: "Wouldn't it be nice and convenient for you if we had an accident at this speed? That is, if I were the only one killed."

Gradually he slowed the car and neither of them said anything for a while. Then Gladys said: "Okay, honey, you win. I feel too good to fight, any more. Maybe you're right and you'll bowl Nila

right over with your beautiful looks and flashy line. Okay?"

He didn't say anything.

"Only I still doubt it," she went on, "because if the old man even catches you sniffing around her, he'll kill you. He's already thrown a drunk fisherman who asked Nila for a date, into the lake. Anyhow, she's the serious type, honey, not interested in just a fast hassle. It would take too much of your time."

He still didn't answer.

"But give a whirl, doll, if it'll make you happy," she said. "You know me, not a jealous bone in my big old body and, anyhow, we had it understood that you could have your little outside parties, so long as you're discreet and don't get too serious about anyone. Okay?"

There was no answer. Marchand didn't speak again all the way home. When they got to the house, he left the car in the drive and got out, without waiting for Gladys and went on inside by himself. He went straight to the room that had been turned over to him as a studio. He set up a clean canvas. For a number of hours he painted furiously, without stopping. When he finished, exhausted, he stepped back and examined what he had done. It was a rough but effective full length portrait of Nila Foster, as he had last seen her, half turned around to look back at him.

He saw immediately that he'd captured some alive quality that he'd never been able to put on canvas before. At the same time that it awed him a little, it brought out all the fury and frustration in him.

"Christ, what's the matter with me?" he said. "Blowing my stack over some dumb kid in a hick fishing camp!"

He slapped a brush into the oils and started splashing paint haphazardly over the portrait until it was obliterated. Then he went over and flung himself face down on the studio couch, breathing as though he'd just run a long, long way.

He lay there, thinking about Nila and the things Gladys had told him about her and the way it was with him and Gladys.

When he'd married her three years before, Gladys had been considered a hopeless alcoholic. He figured he had it made. In a few years she'd either drink herself to death or fall, have some kind of an accident and he'd be set for life. Even if it took ten years, he figured he could stand it. Then a crazy thing happened, as it sometimes does with alcoholics. She just quit drinking. Nothing spectacular happened to make her do it; she just suddenly seemed to wake up to what she was doing to herself and decided it was ridiculous. She had a little trouble sticking with it the first year but after that it didn't seem to bother her at all. It only bothered Marchand.

Then, a year ago, they'd come to Florida for a vacation and Gladys had fallen in love with the place and they'd settled here permanently and she'd gone off on this outdoor life, fresh water fishing kick. It didn't bother her that Marchand didn't share her enthusiasm. He had his painting, she said.

That was another thing. Marchand had thought that with financial security, not having to worry about working for a living, being able to devote full time to it that he'd develop the real talent he was certain he had. But that hadn't happened. If anything, his work deteriorated, became even less imaginative.

He lay there thinking about that and how different it would be, with a woman like Nila Foster. When he awoke, it was morning. . . .

3.

At three o'clock that next afternoon, he could no longer stand it. Gladys was going into town to shop and Marchand got out his Corvette and headed out for Foster's Fishing Camp. Before he could get out of the car, Nila saw him and came out of the store. He watched her walk toward him. Today, she was wearing a dress, a summer cotton frock that was even more maddening than the outfit she'd worn the day before, though it only hinted at, instead of displaying, the lushness of her figure.

"I told you I'd be back," he said.

She acted flustered, almost scared. "What is it?" she said. "Why are you here?"

He raised his brows in surprise. "Why, to see you of course. Why else?"

She glanced behind her, out over the lake. "Listen, my father knows you're a married man and your wife's one of his best customers. You'd better get out of here."

"Where is he?"

"Out on the lake, around the bend, netting minnows. But he's liable to come back any minute."

He grinned. "What are you so upset about? I just tell him I want to go fishing and I want you as a guide and I've come to make an appointment."

"Are you crazy?" she said. "He wouldn't let me go out on that lake with a strange man."

"Oh, come on, honey. You're over twenty-one, aren't you? How eighteenth century can you get?"

"You don't know my father."

"From what you're telling me I don't even want to."

She glanced apprehensively over her shoulder again. She stamped her foot petulantly. "Will you *please* go away. Please. Right now, before you get me into trouble." She sounded close to crying.

He reached out of the car and caught her wrist. She tried to yank it away once and then let it stay in his grasp. Her flesh felt very smooth and warm and through his fingertips he could feel her pulse racing.

"There's got to be some time I can see you. When he isn't here, maybe? He can't be here all the time."

She shook her head, frantically and tried to pull free from his grip again. Then, her voice desperate, she said: "If I tell you, will you go, now?"

"Sure."

"Well, Mondays. Mondays there isn't much business anyway, after the weekend and we close down. He has a man come in to clean the boats and the dock, work on the motors and he usually goes into town to buy new equipment. Come back Monday."

He let her wrist slip from his hand, then and without another word, without looking at him again, she turned and ran back to the store, disappeared inside.

Trembling, his heart pumping as though after some great exertion, Marchand somehow managed to start up the car and swing around and drive back to the highway. All the way home he sang into the wind rushing past the windshield of the sports car, at the top of his lungs. He hadn't done anything like that since he was a kid of sixteen.

That night for the first time in months he was really, genuinely pleasant with Gladys. He took her out to dinner and then to a movie in town. He didn't see much of the movie, though. He kept thinking about Nila, what it was going to be like with her; he kept going over every wonderful, delightful detail of what it was going to be like, again and again. . . .

4.

The coming Monday, it wasn't anything like he had dreamed it would be. It was the worst day he'd ever spent in his life, for a while.

She was there, all right, and her father wasn't. The only other person at the Camp was a Negro, working on the boats and Nila told Marchand not to worry about him, that he couldn't get her in trouble with her father because the Negro was deaf and dumb.

She was wearing white sharkskin shorts, the kind, buckled at the sides so tightly that the edge of the material bites into the flesh and so snug all around that a man wonders how the girl ever got into them and why they don't split with her slightest movement. And for the first time Marchand really saw her legs. They were tanned not too darkly, so that they looked burnt but were the color of a Malayan woman's. The thighs and calves were in perfect proportion. No muscles or tendons showed and yet there was not the slightest flabbiness either; just taut-skinned fullness, roundness. Her waist was so tiny it cut in sharply from the arch of her hips.

The first moment he looked at her that day, Marchand just stood there shaking his head, an awed expression on his face. She gave a short, slightly self-conscious laugh but he knew that his obvious admiration pleased her.

For a few moments they talked the meaningless, fencing, preliminary small-talk of strangers and then Nila said: "We can go out in a boat, if you'd like. I've figured out a way so that we won't be caught even if my father should come back a little early."

"Swell," Marchand said. "What's the bit?"

She told him that at the far end of the lake there was a small strip of beach to land a boat and a path leading from it to a side road. She had already towed a boat up there and left it. Now, if they drove up to that path in Marchand's car, when he was ready to leave, she'd drop him off at the strip of beach again and come back alone in the boat. She said that she often went out on the lake alone, when her father was away and he wouldn't think anything about it.

On the dirt road, near the almost unnoticeable-from-a-distance path that led to the lake, they got out of his Corvette and started through a dense stand of jackpine and punk trees and live oak, dripping with moss. Fallen needles were a soft carpet under their feet and the Florida summer heat was softened to an almost-coolness. Walking behind Nila, Marchand felt as though the two of them, here, were all alone in the world and always had been and would be and the excitement of that was almost unbearable to him.

Several times he stopped her and moved close but it didn't do him any good. She didn't make a big routine out of it. She just looked at him, softly and whispered: "No, Ray! Please, no. Please?" And so he let her alone. If anybody had ever told him anything like that could happen, he would have gone into convulsions of laughter.

They went out onto the lake in the boat and just drifted. They were in a large cove cut off from sight from the main part of the lake and the houses and fishing camps around it. There was nothing but the thick, high breeze-waved reeds around the shore and here and there a tangle of dead tree branches reaching gnarled and twisted, out of the water and herons and cranes standing in the shallows, patiently, waiting for minnows. The sun was hot on them but the over-the-water breeze kept them from perspiring. And they sat, she at one end of the boat, he at the other and talked.

He told her about the way it was and had been with himself and Gladys. She told him how it had been very rough for her and her father and it had been only in recent years that they'd had any kind of comforts. Pops Foster had started his camp with a couple of broken down old boats and a crude shanty, with only one room.

"That's why I'm sticking through college," she said. "I don't know how, but I'm going to get a lot of money, somehow, for my father and me. Maybe I'll marry somebody with money; maybe

I'll figure some way to make it. I might even try it the way you said, Ray, going to New York or California. I've been thinking about it since you mentioned it."

They talked a lot and then came the time when there seemed nothing else to talk about and suddenly he got up and moved to her end of the boat and sat beside her. "Nila," he said, very quietly, "Why won't you let me kiss you? You know how bad I want to, don't you? You know how it is with me, don't you, how it's been since the first second I saw you? Girls always do."

She turned her head away. She didn't answer.

"It's the same with you, too, isn't it?" he said. "Guys know, too. . . . And you *want* me to kiss you, so why won't you let me? I've never asked before, Nila, but I knew I had to with you. You'll let me, won't you?"

"No, Ray," she said.

"Why not? There isn't any reason, really, not any good enough reason."

"Yes, there is. Once I kiss you, Ray, I'll be finished; you could do anything you wanted to me or with me. I can't have that. You're married, Ray. I've always done everything all at once and big and for keeps. When I love a man, it's going to be that way, too. And it can't be that way with us, Ray, don't you see?"

"No," he said. "All I see is that we've got to have each other or we'll both go crazy."

It became something he couldn't control then; the hot beautiful nearness of her was too much for him.

She fought him and the strength of her surprised him. It also made him that much more desperate and determined to have her. When both of them fell to the floor of the boat, she stopped struggling quite so hard. Then, a moment later, so suddenly it surprised him, her furious writhing and twisting was no longer against what he was trying to do but with it, helping him.

5.

His head was in her lap and she was finger-combing his thick, touseled black hair. He said: "I don't know, Nila. I just don't know. Don't think I haven't thought about it, before I met you, even. I've wanted out for a long time, now but there just isn't any way. Sure, I could probably get some kind of a divorce but I wouldn't get any real loot out of it. I'd be lucky if I even got her to pay the costs. She's a stubborn old gal and if she got really riled-up, which she would, she'd fight me all the way."

Nila didn't say anything.

After a while Marchand said: "I don't expect you to understand. Anybody who hasn't really *had* a lot of money, couldn't possibly. You don't know how wonderful it is, honey. Christ, I could never go back to being poor again. Not ever."

She sighed. "I don't blame you. I guess I do understand and I wouldn't want you to, even. If we did it that way, you'd be miserable in a few weeks and then I would, too. Remember I told you I want money, too."

"Aw, hell," he said. "We'll think of something. We'll work something out." He reached up to pull her head down to kiss him.

She pulled away. "Will we, Ray? I don't think so. I think it's pretty hopeless. I'm not sorry for what happened this afternoon. I'm glad. But it's not going to happen again. I'm not going to see you any more, Ray. This was crazy and it was wonderful while it was happening, but it's over now. I mean that."

He protested, argued, but it did no good. She remained adamant and finally she had to leave and he walked back through the pine-scented, cool, silent woods alone to his car.

The next week was hell for Marchand. He fought it every way he could; he got drunk; he went over to Tampa and blew his whole week's $400 allowance from Gladys on a whole roomful of B-girls; he fought with Gladys constantly, but none of it did any good. He thought of Nila all the time, when he ate, when he drank, even when he slept. And as Monday came closer, he knew that no matter what, he had to see her again.

Monday afternoon, he drove out to the camp and he almost went insane when he found that Nila wasn't there. He finally learned, through the gesticulations of the deaf and dumb Negro, working on the boats, that Nila had taken one of them and gone out on the lake. Then, after much futile motioning and trying to convey his idea, unsuccessfully, he finally got through to the Negro that he'd pay him to fix a motor on one of the boats and let him go out. The Negro said no, until he saw the twenty dollar bill Marchand held out.

Marchand found her, lying on the small strip of sandy beach, in the cove, where they'd rendezvoused the week before. She must have heard the sound of the motor coming toward shore, but she never looked up. Even when Marchand beached the boat and walked over to her and kneeled beside her, she didn't look up. She lay with her eyes closed. She was wearing a strapless black bathing suit, zipped down one side.

Marchand said: "Why weren't you there, Nila? Why did you do that to me? I almost went crazy when you weren't there."

She didn't answer for a moment and he watched the deep rise and fall of the slopes of her breasts, overflowing the top of the swimsuit, showing an edge of whiteness against the tan. Then she said:

"I was afraid to be there. I guess I knew you'd come and I knew I wouldn't be able to refuse you, yet I *couldn't* see you again."

"You *are* seeing me, though. Right now."

"Yes," she said. "Even with my eyes closed. The way I've been seeing you all week."

He lowered his face against her throat and fastened on a small pulse beating there. His hand fumbled for and found the zipper of the suit. "Nila, Nila, Nila," he whispered. . . .

6.

The idea came to him, afterward, when Nila wanted them to go swimming off the little beach and he had to admit to her that he'd never learned to swim. She stared at him, amazed, as though she'd never heard of such a thing. He was a little embarrassed about it. Almost defensively, he said:

"Hell, lots of people can't, Nila."

"I suppose," she said. "I guess I've just never met any of them before."

"You've met one other," he said. "My wife. Gladys can't swim a stroke, either."

"She can't?" Nila said. Then a strange, dreamy look came into her eyes and suddenly she turned her face away. "Oh," she said. "That was terrible, awful! I—don't know what's come over me."

"What?" he said. "What are you talking about?"

"What I was thinking." She still couldn't look at him.

"What was it?"

"About your wife. It—was a terrible thing to think of, Ray, but I—well, I just couldn't seem to help it. Forget about it, please, will you? I don't even want to talk about it."

"Maybe we should talk about it." He took hold of her shoulders, his fingers digging in. "What were you thinking about Gladys, Nila? Something about the fact that she can't swim? You were thinking about her going out on the lake, all the time, weren't you? You were thinking how convenient it would be if something would happen; if a storm would come up and the boat would turn over and sink or something, weren't you?"

"No, Ray!" she said. "No, no, I wasn't."

"Yes, you were." He was talking almost breathlessly now and his mind seemed to be going wild. He was suddenly full of a weird excitement.

"All right." She turned back to face him and her lower lip protruded a little, defiantly. "It was wrong, of course, but maybe I was. Maybe I was even wishing it *would* happen, but it won't, of course."

"You mean because your father is always out there in the boat with her. Is that what you mean?"

"Of course. He's a very powerful swimmer."

"Yeah," Marchand said. He turned away from her and began pacing up and down the beach. Then he came back and stood in front of her. "But your father doesn't *have* to be out there in the boat with her from now on. Why couldn't I suddenly decide to take up fishing? Why couldn't I start going out there in the boat with her?"

She pulled back away from him, her eyes very large and frightened looking, her mouth O'd. "Ray!" she gasped. "What are we talking about? Are we out of our minds or something? We've got to stop talking like this."

"Do we? She could fall out of the boat, couldn't she? If I happened to rock it at the wrong time or something? The lake is pretty deep, isn't it, in places?"

She nodded. "Out in the middle, it's very deep. But this is silly, Ray. It's just crazy talk. Even if it wasn't, it would be stupid. It would be so obvious. They'd get you for it, Ray. After all, the circumstances *would* be suspicious, you so much younger than Gladys and she's so wealthy. It would look awfully bad, Ray."

"Why, for Christ's sake?" he said. "It would be an accident."

"They'd wonder why you couldn't save her. You could reach out an oar to her. Then there are those two seat cushions, you know, the ones the law says have to be there, one to a person. They're life preservers, you know, filled with cork or kapok or something. All you'd have to do would be to throw her one of those."

"Yeah," he said. "You're right, I'm afraid."

She moved into his arms and she was trembling all over, now. "Ray, Ray, we've got to stop this. We can't do anything like that and you know it. You *know* it!"

"Wait a minute," he said. "The life preservers, those cushions. You've given me the answer."

She looked up at him, her eyes still frightened.

"Don't you see, honey," he said. "It's a natural. I don't push her, at all. The boat tips over. I tip it. But before I do, I get hold of her cushion, as well as my own, on some pretext. When we're both in the water, I'll shove the boat away so she can't hold onto it. I'll have both cushions. . . . Later, I'll tell them that one of the cushions just floated out of reach when the boat tipped over. I'll tell them I tried to get to her but she went down before I could reach her. With me not being able to swim, either, it's a natural. That day, before we go out, I'll make some kidding remark to your father about neither one of us being able to swim."

She pressed her whole body against him, now, her fingernails digging into his shoulder blades. "Oh, no, Ray, no!" she whispered. "Please, no, Ray. Stop it! Stop it!"

"Stop it?" He felt filled with a vicious, terrible exhilaration, the way he imagined it would feel to be soaring on some narcotic. "You can't stop something like this, Nila. It was *meant* to be—the whole thing. Don't you see?"

"No," she said again but there was less spirit in the protest, this time.

"Nila, you know how much she's worth?"

She shook her head.

"Over three quarters of a million dollars. Do you have any *idea* what it's like to have that kind of money?"

"But—would you get it, Ray, if—"

"Of course. She has no living relatives, not even distant ones. And she's never made a will. Her lawyer's got after her about it a number of times but she just treats it as a joke. She says she's nowhere near ready to die. You don't know her. She won't even admit to herself that she's beginning to get old. Not seriously."

"You'd never get away with it, Ray."

"You're crazy; it can't miss. Now I'm on the right track, all the little pieces are beginning to fall into place. You'll be on shore, watching that day. You'll see the whole thing. She stood up, we'll tell them and leaned over too far, to pull in a fish and, when she lost her balance, started to fall, she grabbed the edge of the boat and capsized it."

"It'll still look funny, Ray. I mean, you're suddenly going out with her like that, when you've never cared anything about fishing."

"I've thought of that, too, Nila. That's easy. It won't happen the first time I go out with her. Sure, I'll suddenly decide to take up fishing, to be more companionable to my wife, but what's wrong with that? Especially if the accident doesn't happen until we've already been out on the lake together three or four times. We'll make it the fourth trip, definitely."

"But suppose, even though you do go out with her, fishing, she still insists on taking my father along as a guide?"

"All right. If she wants him to go along the first time or two, okay. I let him. But then I just tell her I don't want him along any more; I just want the two of us to be alone for a change."

She rubbed her mouth softly against his shoulder. "I don't know, Ray. It's such a horrible thing to do, to even think about."

"Look," he told her. "Dreaming about getting rich, getting that kind of money by working hard for it, through a lucky break or something, is kid stuff. It's pipe-dream stuff. It never happens. You've got to have the guts and cold nerve to pull something big, to go *after* the money, to let nothing stop you. You think we'll ever get it any other way—either of us?"

She stepped back away from him and closed her eyes and put the back of her hand against her forehead.

"All right, Ray. All right. But don't let's talk about it any more. I feel a little sick and my head's starting to hurt. We can't rush right into it, anyhow. Let's think it over for a week."

"All right, honey," he said. He smiled, faintly. He was pretty sure he'd sold her. Any thinking she did about it from now on, would be the right way.

7.

That night he started right in, priming Gladys, so that she wouldn't be suspicious, later. He bought a paperback book about fresh water angling, at a drug store. He asked Gladys a lot of questions about the sport.

She looked at him curiously, said: "What's the pitch, lover? This is out of character for you."

"Maybe I'm just getting smart," he said. "I've been thinking a lot about it. I figure there must be something to this fishing gimmick, so many millions of people seem to get a charge out of it. I don't want to miss anything, but how'll I know, if I don't look into it a little."

She shook her head, wonderingly. "For the first time since I met you, you really surprise me; you've caught me off guard. Well, you won't last long at it, that's one sure thing. You just aren't the type, Handsome—even though there isn't supposed to *be any* type."

"Well, I figure a little sunshine and fresh air and mild exercise might be good for me, too. I feel pretty edgy and kind of rundown, these days. No interest in anything, even my painting, you know. Maybe it would be like a kind of therapy."

"Maybe," she said. "You'll try it once, probably, and that'll be it."

Two days later, Marchand went fishing with his wife. Gladys bought a spinning outfit and some plugs for him from Nila, in the little store. Nila scarcely looked at him, all the time and he knew for sure, then, that she was going along with him.

Pops Foster went out with them, that first time. Marchand was surprised to find that he was a likeable old guy, who knew how to handle a boat and seemed to have an uncanny instinct about where they'd find fish. He had a laconic, dry sense of humor, too, Marchand learned and seemed to be surprisingly intelligent in a shrewd, native sort of way. Following Foster's advice, carefully, Marchand landed his first fish, a three and a half pound bass, on his fourth cast. In a little less than three hours they had taken their limit and in spite of himself, Marchand was excited and happy about the expedition. He didn't have to fake it.

On the way back, Foster watched Marchand examining the catch and said: "Reckon the bug's bitten your mister pretty hard, Miz Marchand. You probably won't be able to keep him away from the lake, from now on."

Gladys chuckled. "If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed it. But the real test'll be when we spend a few hours out here some day, one of those bad days, and don't even get a strike. That separates the men from the ribbon clerks in this sport."

Marchand just grinned at them.

That night, in bed, he thought about all that had happened. But by then he'd forgotten the excitement of the sport, itself. Another, greater excitement

seized him. The first big step had been taken. And both Gladys and old man Foster had been sold on his enthusiasm. There would be no cause for suspicion on that score. He wished he could see Nila alone for five minutes, just to tell her how well it was going. But he knew that wouldn't be wise. It would be best to stay completely away from her from now until it was all over and probably even for some time after that. It might even be best if they waited until the end of the summer and she started back to College, before he saw her again. It would probably look bad for him to go back to the lake where his wife had drowned. Just thinking about waiting that long before he could hold Nila's hot young writhing body close to his own again almost made him sick; made him feel empty and depressed. But he would have to be patient.

Two days later, Gladys was ready to go fishing again. She didn't seem surprised that Marchand volunteered to go with her.

She just shrugged and said: "After today, you'll probably have had it. We probably won't have much luck. There's quite a wind and the lake will be plenty choppy. But we'll see."

They got out to Foster's camp about three o'clock in the afternoon. There was no sun; the sky was completely overcast and a stiff wind was blowing off the lake. On the way out, Marchand had suggested that this time they go out alone. He said that he wanted to see what he could do by himself, without a guide supervising his every move. Gladys didn't seem too surprised and offered almost no protest.

Both old man Foster and his daughter, Nila, were on the dock, when Marchand and his wife shoved off, with Gladys sitting in the stern, operating the outboard. Just before they did so, Gladys shouted over the roar of the motor: "Floyd, keep your fingers crossed that we don't run into a snag and bust a hole in this scow. Neither one of us can swim, you know."

Floyd Foster showed his big strong teeth in a grin and shouted back: "You won't be in any danger. A lot of the lake is shallow. Anyhow, you've got those cushion life preservers."

Then the motor roared louder and they eased away from the dock. Gladys increased throttle as they cleared the narrow canal leading into the dock and got out onto the lake proper. Out on the water the wind was stiffer than ever and as the 15 horse motor revved up to full speed, the lake's choppy whitecaps slapped viciously against the raised prow, as though determined to pound the little craft to pieces.

When Marchand saw that instead of following the shore line toward one of the coves where they'd fished the last time, Gladys was heading straight out toward the deep center of the lake, his heart began to wallop crazily against his ribs.

Cupping his hands about his mouth to be heard over the shriek of the wind and the roar of the motor, he shouted: "Where are we going?"

"Out in the middle," Gladys shouted back. "When it's windy and choppy like this, the fish often stay out in deep water. We'll give it a try out there for half an hour, anyhow, using deep-running plugs. Okay?"

He shook his head. The excitement in him was beginning to get unbearable. Everything was setting it up for *today*. If he had the nerve to take advantage of it, he wouldn't have to wait for two more trips. *It could be today.* He remembered Gladys' remark to Foster about them not being able to swim. She was steering. Foster would remember that, tell the police that, so they'd know it was Gladys' idea to go out into the deep middle of the water. It was made to order for him, today. All he had to do now was find the final courage to go through with it.

In another few minutes, they were in dead center of the lake and Gladys cut the motor. When they drifted to a stop, heading into the wind, Gladys threw out the stern anchor.

"Hurry up and get that bow anchor in, too, honeybunch," she told Marchand. "So we won't keep swinging around."

He watched her, standing up there in the stern, leaning way over, easing the heavy anchor down into the water. Something inside of him, shouted: *"Now! Now! You've got a perfect opportunity and the longer you wait the more likely you are to lose your nerve. A thing like this, you do fast, at the first big chance and the less thinking about it, the better.*

Then he glanced back toward the shore and his heart felt as though it had dropped into his stomach. Two figures were still standing on the dock, watching them out here. Nila *and* her father. They would *both* see what he did if he did it now. He couldn't do it, now.

"Goddamn that old goat," he thought. "Why can't he stop gawping and go back about his business?"

Angrily, he reached down and picked up the chained cinder-block that was used as the bow anchor, squatting a little, to put the strain of the weight on his legs instead of his back. He didn't ease the anchor into the water the way Gladys had. In his temper, he heaved it in with a great splash that sloughed water over him and into the boat. At the same time, the effort to heave the heavy block and the sudden release of its weight, made him lurch, almost lose his balance. He had just recovered it and was about to turn around when he felt something digging into the small of his back. He twisted his head, yelling in protest.

Unbelievingly, he saw Gladys holding an oar, the blade of which she'd set against the middle of his spine and now her face was twisted partly in an evil grin and partly from the strain of her effort as she shoved against the oar with all her might.

Marchand felt himself being thrust ludicrously off balance, his arms, flailing. He felt the sound of his own screaming being whipped away from his mouth by the strong wind as he went headlong over the side of the boat.

Just before he hit the water, he twisted and saw Gladys still standing in the boat, clutching one of the cushion life preservers against her chest and hurling the other one out of the boat on the opposite side from him.

He hit the water and had a momentary surprised awareness that it wasn't cold; it was actually luke warm, near the surface. He went under and a quantity of the brackish tasting water rushed into his mouth before he could close it, choking him, making his eyes feel as though they would pop. He thrashed violently and finally surfaced. When his head broke into the air, he coughed out water and tried to gulp in air. He was looking squarely at the boat, swung around so that it was almost ten yards away from him, now and saw Gladys, holding the cushion-preserver against her chest with one hand and clutching the gunwale of the small boat with the other, while she stood, furiously rocking the boat, trying to capsize it. Marchand was starting to go down again, when he saw the boat go over, saw Gladys pitch into the water, still clutching the life preserver, a good twenty feet away from him.

As Marchand started to sink again, he flailed frantically, trying to force himself toward her. But the effort only made him seem to sink faster.

The last thing Marchand thought was what a prize fish he had been. Just like a stupid, greedy, unsuspecting bass, he'd gone for the lure they'd thrown in front of him—Nila. And now that it was too late, Marchand could see how a woman like Gladys could get tired of him and fall for a man like Floyd Foster, her own age, her own type.

The fact that he knew now, for sure, that Nila had been in on it from the first moment, had suckered him so beautifully from beginning to end, was a blow so sickening that he almost welcomed the big, swelling, swelling blackness that was filling his head to bursting.

Out-Stink

In Highland Park, Calif., Officer M. N. Alexander was not allowed to enter police headquarters to file a report. He and a skunk had fired at each other simultaneously. Both shots found their target. The skunk died.

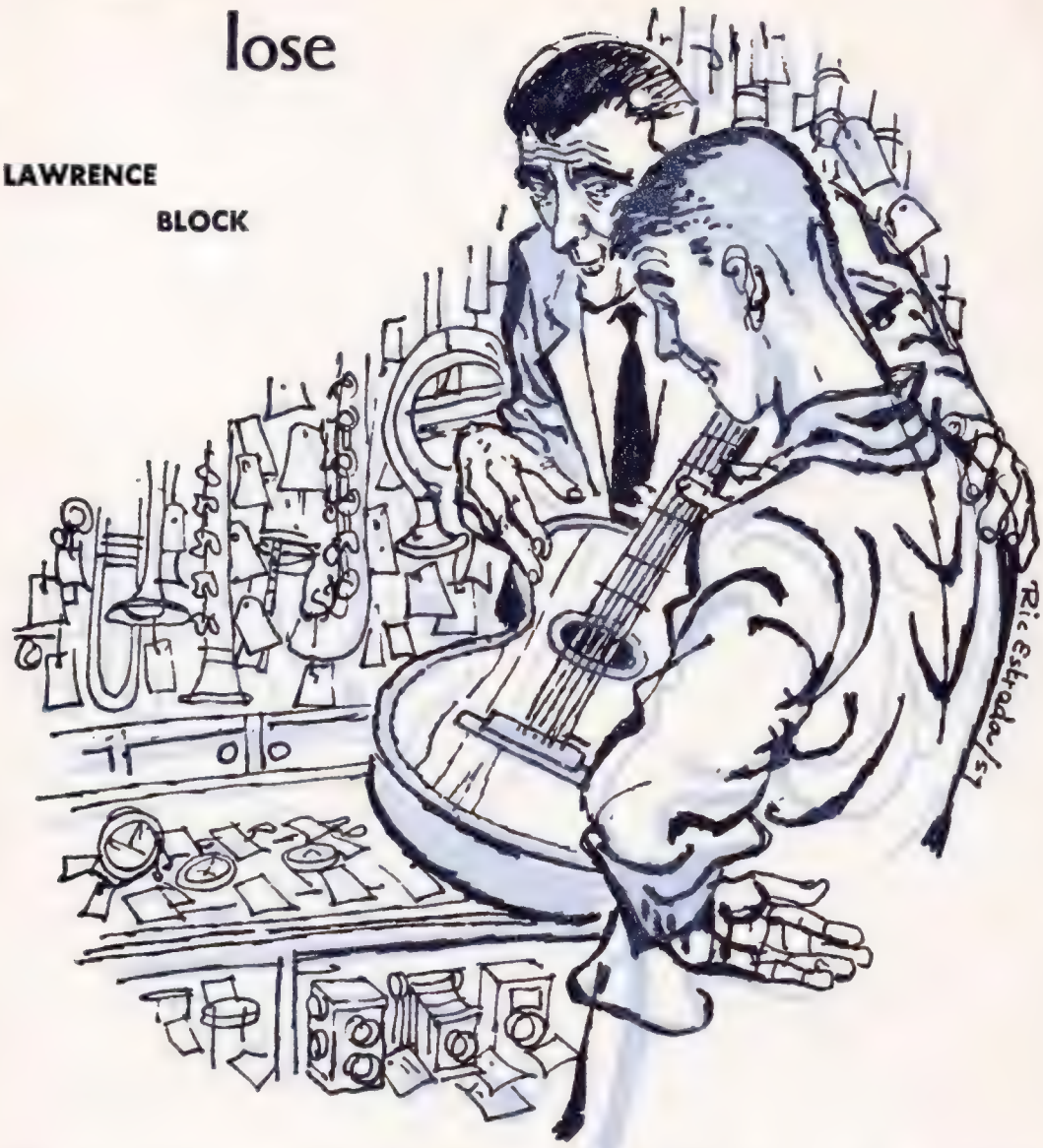
Extended Visit

Glenn C. Eller, Detroit, Mich., took advantage of "Know Your Police Week" and joined several hundred persons in a tour of police headquarters. He ended up by knowing the police well. As Eller was leaving the station, Patrolman Cecil Scroggins noticed a night stick bulging in the visitor's pocket. Judge John P. Scallen gave Eller 10 days for simple larceny.

you can't lose

You don't have to slave at some stupid job to make money. All you have to do is listen to me. . . .

by LAWRENCE BLOCK



Anyone who starves in this country deserves it. Really. Almost anybody who is dumb enough to want to work can get a job without any back-breaking effort. Blindies and crips haul in twenty-five bucks an hour bumming the Times Square district. And if you're like me—able-bodied and all, but you just don't like to work, all you got to do is use your head a little. It's simple.

Of course, before you all throw up your jobs, let me explain that this routine has its limitations. I don't eat caviar, and East Third Street is a long way from Sutton Place. But I never cared much for caviar, and the pad I have is a comfortable one. It's a tiny room a couple blocks off the Bowery, furnished with a mattress, a refrigerator, a stove, a chair, and a table. The cockroaches get me out of bed, dress me, and walk me down to the bathroom down the hall. Maybe you couldn't live in a place like that, but I sort of like it. There's no problem keeping it up, 'cause it couldn't get any worse.

My meals, like I said, are not caviar. For instance, in the refrigerator right now I have a sack of coffee, a dozen eggs, and part of a fifth of bourbon. Every morning I have two fried eggs and a cup of coffee. Every evening I have three fried eggs and two cups of coffee. I figure, you find something you like, you should stick with it.

And the whole thing is cheap. I pay twenty a month for the room, which is cheap anywhere and

amazing in New York. And in this neighborhood food prices are pretty low too.

All in all, I can live on ten bucks a week with no trouble. At the moment I have fifty bucks in my pocket, so I'm set for a month, maybe a little more. I haven't worked in four months, haven't had any income in three.

I live, more or less, by my wits. I hate to work. What the hell, what good are brains if you have to work for a living? A cat lives fifty, sixty, maybe seventy years, and that's not a long time. He might as well spend his time doing what he likes. Me, I like to walk around, see people, listen to music, read, drink, smoke, and get a dame. So that's what I do. Since nobody's paying people to walk around or read or anything, I pick up some gold when I can. There's always a way.

By this I don't mean that I'm a mugger or a burglar or anything like that. It might be tough for you to get what I'm saying, so let me explain.

I mentioned that I worked four months ago, but I didn't say that I only held the job for a day. It was at a drugstore on West 96th Street. I got a job there as a stock and delivery boy on a Monday morning. It was easy enough getting the job. I reported for work with a couple of sandwiches in a beat-up gym bag. At four that afternoon I took out a delivery and forgot to come back. I had twenty shiny new Zippo lighters in the gym bag, and they brought anywhere from a buck to a buck-seventy-five at the Third Avenue hockshops. That was enough money for three weeks, and it took me all of one day to earn it. No chance of him catching me, either. He's got a fake name and a fake address, and he probably didn't notice the lighters were missing for a while.

Dishonest? Obviously, but so what? The guy deserved it. He told me straight off the Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood were not the cleverest mathematicians in the world, and when I made a sale I should short-change them and we'd split fifty-fifty. Why should I play things straight with a bum like that? He can afford the loss. Besides, I worked one day free for him, didn't I?

It's all a question of using your head. If you think things out carefully, decide just what you want, and find a smart way to get it, you come out ahead, time after time. Like the way I got out of going into the army.

The army, as far as I'm concerned, is strictly for the sparrows. I couldn't see it a year ago, and I still can't. When I got my notice I had to think fast. I didn't want to try faking the eye chart or anything like that, and I didn't think I would get away with a conscientious objector pitch. Anyway, those guys usually wind up in stir or working twice as hard as everybody else. When the idea came to me it seemed far too simple, but it worked. I got myself deferred for homosexuality.

It was a panic. After the physical I went in for the psychiatric, and I played the beginning fairly straight, only I acted generally hesitant.

Then the Doc asks, "Do you like girls?"

"Well," I blurt out, "only as friends."

"Have you ever gone with girls?"

"Oh, no!" I managed to sound somewhat appalled at the idea.

I hesitated for a minute or two, then admitted that I was homosexual. I was deferred, of course.

You'd thing that everybody who really wanted to avoid the army would try this, but they won't. It's psychological. Men are afraid of being homosexual, or of having people think they're homosexual. They're even afraid of some skull doctor who never saw them before and never will see them again. So many people are so stupid, if you just act a little smart you can't miss. After the examination was over I spent some time with the whore who lives across the hall from me. No sense talking myself into anything. A cat doesn't watch out, he can be too smart, you know.

To get back to my story—the money from the zippos lasted two weeks, and I was practically broke again. This didn't bother me though. I just sat around the pad for a while, reading and smoking, and sure enough, I got another idea that I figured would be worth a few bucks. I showered and shaved, and made a half-hearted attempt at shining my shoes. I had some shoe polish from the drugstore. I had had some room in the gym bag after the zippos, so I stocked up on toothpaste, shoe polish, aspirins, and that kind of junk. Then I put on the suit that I keep clean for emergencies. I usually wear dungarees, but once a month I need a suit for something, so I always have it clean and ready. Then, with a tie on and my hair combed for a change, I looked almost human. I left the room, splurged fifteen cents for a bus ride, and got off at Third Avenue and Sixtieth Street. At the corner of Third and 59th is a small semi-hockshop that I cased a few days before. They do more buying-and-selling than actual pawning, and there aren't too many competitors right in the neighborhood. Their stock is average —the more common and lower-priced musical instruments, radios, cameras, record players, and the cheap stuff—clocks, lighters, rings, watches, and so on. I got myself looking as stupid as possible and walked in.

There must be thousands of hockshops in New York, but there are only two types of clerks. The first is usually short, bald, and over forty. He wears suspenders, talks straight to the lower-class customers and kowtows to the others. Most of the guys farther downtown fit into this category. The other type is like the guy I drew: tall, thick black hair, light-colored suit, and a wide smile. He talks gentleman-to-gentleman with his upper-class customers and patronizingly to the bums. Of the two, he's usually more dangerous.

My man came on with the Johnny-on-the-spot pitch, ready and willing to serve. I hated him immediately.

"I'm looking for a guitar," I said, "preferably a good one. Do you have anything in stock at the moment?" I saw six or seven on the wall, but when you play it dumb, you play it dumb.

"Yes," he said. "Do you play guitar?" I didn't, and told him so. No point in lying all the time. But, I added, I was going to learn.

He picked one off the wall and started plucking the strings. "This is an excellent one, and I can let you have it for only 35 dollars. Would you like to pay cash or take it on the installment plan?"

I must have been a good actor, because he was certainly playing me for a mark. The guitar was a Pelton, and it was in good shape, but it never cost more than forty bucks new, and he had a nerve asking more than twenty-five. Any minute now he might tell me that the last owner was an old lady who only played hymns on it. I held back the laugh and plunked the guitar like a nice little customer.

"I like the sound. And the price sounds about right to me."

"You'll never find a better bargain." Now this was laying it on with a trowel.

"Yes, I'll take it." He deserved it now. "I was just passing by, and I don't have much money with me. Could I make a down payment and pay the rest weekly?"

He probably would have skipped the down payment. "Surely," he said. For some reason I've always disliked guys who say "Surely". No reason, really. "How much would you like to pay now?"

I told him I was really short at the moment, but could pay ten dollars a week. Could I just put a dollar down? He said I could, but in that case the price would have to be forty dollars, which is called putting the gouge on.

I hesitated a moment for luck, then agreed. When he asked for identification I pulled out my pride and joy.

In a wallet that I also copped from that drugstore I have the best identification in the world, all phony and all legal. Everything in it swears up and down that my name is Leonard Blake and I live on Riverside Drive. I have a baptismal certificate that I purchased from a sharp little entrepreneur at our high school back in the days when I needed proof of age to buy a drink. I have a Social Security card that can't be used for identification purposes but always is, and an unapproved application for a driver's license. To get one of these you just go to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and fill it out. It isn't stamped, but no pawnbroker ever noticed that. Then there are membership cards in everything from the Captain Marvel Club to the NAACP. Of course he took my buck and I signed some papers.

I made it next to Louie's shop at 35th and Third. Louie and I know each other, so there's no haggling. He gave me fifteen for the guitar, and I let him know it wouldn't be hot for at least ten days. That's the way I like to do business.

Fifteen bucks was a week and a half, and you see how easy it was. And it's fun to shaft a guy who deserves it, like that sharp clerk did. But when I got back to the pad and read some old magazines, I got another idea before I even had a chance to start spending the fifteen.

I was reading one of those magazines that are filled with really exciting information, like how to build a model of the Great Wall of China around your house, and I was wondering what kind of damn fool would want to build a wall around his house, much less a Great Wall of China type wall, when the idea hit me. Wouldn't a hell of a lot of the same type of people like a Sheffield steel dagger, 25 inches long, an authentic copy of a twelfth century relic recently discovered in a Bergdorf castle? And all this for only two bucks postpaid, no COD's? I figured they might.

This was a big idea, and I had to plan it just right. A classified in that type of magazine cost two dollars, a post office box cost about five for three months. I was in a hurry, so I forgot about lunch, and rushed across town to the Chelsea Station on Christopher Street, and Lennie Blake got himself a Post Office Box. Then I fixed up the ad a little, changing "25 inches" to "over two feet". And customers would please allow three weeks for delivery. I sent ads and money to three magazines, and took a deep breath. I was now president of Comet Enterprises. Or Lennie Blake was. Who the hell cared?

For the next month and a half I stalled on the rent and ate as little as possible. The magazines hit the stands after two weeks, and I gave people time to send in. Then I went West again and picked up my mail.

A hell of a lot of people wanted swords. There were about two hundred envelopes, and after I finished throwing out the checks and requests for information, I wound up with $196 and 67 3¢ stamps. Anybody want to buy a stamp?

See what I mean? The whole bit couldn't have been simpler. There's no way in the world they can trace me, and nobody in the Post Office could possibly remember me. That's the beauty of New York—so many people. And how much time do you think the cops will waste looking for a two-bit swindler? I could even have made another pick-up at the Post Office, but greedy guys just don't last long in this game. And a federal rap I need like a broken ankle.

Right now I'm 100% in the clear. I haven't heard a rumble on the play yet, and already Lennie Blake is dead—burned to ashes and flushed down the

toilet. Right now I'm busy establishing Warren Shaw. I sign the name, over and over, so that I'll never make a mistake and sign the wrong name sometime. One mistake is above par for the course.

Maybe you're like me. I don't mean with the same fingerprints and all, but the same general attitudes. Do you fit the following general description: smart, coldly logical, content with coffee and eggs in a cold-water walk-up, and ready to work like hell for an easy couple of bucks? If that's you, you're hired. Come right in and get to work. You can even have my room. I'm moving out tomorrow.

It's been kicks, but too much of the same general pattern and the law of averages gets you. I've been going a long time, and one pinch would end everything. Besides, I figure it's time I took a step or two up the social ladder.

I had a caller yesterday, a guy named Al. He's an older guy, and hangs with a mob uptown on the West Side. He always has a cigar jammed into the corner of his mouth and he looks like a holdover from the 'twenties, but Al is a very sharp guy. We gassed around for awhile, and then he looked me in the eyes and chewed on his cigar.

"You know," he said, "we might be able to use you."

"I always work alone, Al."

"You'd be working alone. Two hundred a night."

I whistled. This was sounding good. "What's the pitch?"

He gave me the look again and chewed his cigar some more. "Kid," he said, "did you ever kill a man?"

Two hundred bucks for one night's work! What a perfect racket! Wish me luck, will you? I start tonight.

Perfectionist

Patrolman Ronald Carlson investigated when he noticed husky Lacey Claude, 28, trotting down the street with Steve Bacena, a small man, riding on his shoulders in Chicago. After being rescued, Bacena told the officer that Claude had picked him up with the remark: "Keep quiet. This is going to be a holdup as soon as I find a good place to pull it."

Pews to Prisoners

Mayor Donald L. Heiwig, of Seymour, Ind., has asked the city council to purchase the former First Baptist church. He wants to turn it into a jail.

Fiery Mash

Louisiana State Penitentiary officials at Angola, following their noses, stopped at a large fire extinguisher on a wall. When they unscrewed the top, they found it filled with fermenting mash.

Old Wadaslaw was too mean to live. So, very suddenly, old Wadaslaw died. . . .

by JOHN D. MACDONALD

Black Cat in the Snow

When I got the phone call from the State Police Barracks that Trooper Jerry Jackson was on his way to pick me up, I cut old Mrs. Agnew off in the middle of a symptom and told Alice to let the folks in the waiting room know that they could take their chances on sticking around, but I didn't know just how soon I'd be back.

"Accident in the woods?" Alice asked.

"Not this time. Martin Wadaslaw got himself shot."

I saw a little gleam of satisfaction in Alice's eyes. She certainly wasn't hypocrite enough to make any noises of regret. And I was pretty certain that gleam would be repeated in most of the eyes in the village. Up here in Pattenberg, in the wildest part of the Adirondacks, there's only nine hundred of us in permanent residence, and we get to know each other pretty well. In the summer the influx of campers keeps things stirred up, but after the hunting season is over and the snow stands deep on the hills that ring the town and the ice is as blue and hard

as steel on our three lakes, we live in each other's pockets.

I am as charitable toward my fellow man as anybody, but I'd never been able to find a trace of good in Martin Wadaslaw. He was born mean and he lived mean. He had been a lumberjack, and when a chain broke about twelve years ago, he lost a leg and got a pension from the lumber company. At that time he had a bunch of halfgrown kids and a wornout wife. Before his accident he drank heavy enough to keep his family on short rations, and so the kids old enough to work were doing what they could. Good kids. Bright and hardy and energetic. The accident should have killed Martin—would have killed a normal man—but he was too mean to die. There's some say that the men who had to work with him had something to do with that chain breaking, but maybe that's just gossip. After Martin began to spend all his time home, his wife lasted about two years before she died, and then the kids began to scatter.

I knew there was just six people living in the home place. Martin, and one of his older boys, Stanley, and the only unmarried girl, Rose. Then there was Stanley's wife, Helen—she was one of the Ritter girls—and Stanley and Helen's two small kids. I'd delivered both of them. And Helen too.

The Ritters didn't go much for Helen marrying a Wadaslaw. Thought it beneath her or something. But she got one of the best in town. Stanley owns and operates the big fishing lodge on Crossbow Lake. During the winter he closes up and they move back into the home place, and in between building boats in the barn, he works on the County snow plow, the one they keep here in Pattenberg.

I'd heard the old man was getting worse, if anything, and that things were pretty tense out there at the Wadaslaws. I knew the old man had beat Rose up pretty bad because I took care of her. And I'd heard that Stanley had changed his mind about wintering at the lodge just so Rose wouldn't be left alone with the old man.

I had what I thought I'd need in the bag and when I saw the trooper car coming, I went out to the curb. The tires squeaked on the snow and Jerry swung the back door open for me. Trooper Dave Devine was in front with him.

"How bad is he hurt?" I asked.

"Don't know, Doc," Jerry said. "We just got the call from Stanley Wadaslaw saying he'd shot the old man."

"It's time somebody shot him," I said, "but that's a hell of a mess."

We went into town, fast, and turned onto the Little Karega Mountain Road. When we pulled into the driveway some neighbors were there, and Deputy Sheriff Bob Trable was there, and it was a good thing he was, because he'd kept anybody from trampling on the marks in the snow in the side yard.

They hadn't wanted to move old Martin much. You could see where he'd fallen, just outside the side door to the kitchen, and the footprints where they'd picked him up and lugged him inside the door and put him on a blanket on the kitchen floor. They'd unbuttoned his shirt and the front of his long johns. He was so hairy it was hard to see the small hole, just under the rib cage and dead center. His color and his breathing were bad. They said he'd been like that ever since the bullet hit him twenty minutes ago. While I was fudying around opening my bag the hoarse shallow breathing stopped. I lay my head on his chest and listened to dead silence. I gave him a shot to try to jolt the heart back into action, but he was dead and gone. I folded the loose part of the blanket over him, and Rose gave a little whimper, but her eyes were dry.

Stanley, as big as his father had been, stood with his feet planted, face completely expressionless. There was just Bob Trable, the troopers, Rose, Stanley and me in the kitchen. I could hear a kid crying so I guessed Helen had herded them to another part of the house.

"What happened, Wadaslaw," Jerry Jackson asked.

"It was an accident."

"You shot him."

"Yes, I shot him, but it was an accident."

"You better tell us about it."

Stanley Wadaslaw told us, and he showed us. He had a Winchester .22, a bolt action. He said he'd been in the kitchen and seen crows out in the side lot, beyond the barn. So he'd put on a jacket, taken the rifle and gone out. We were able to follow his footsteps in the snow to the fence. He said the crows had moved out of range. So he had started back to the house.

"I had a shell in the chamber. Our black cat ran from the corner of the barn there over toward that shed." We looked and saw a lot of cat tracks back and forth. It seemed to be a regular winter route for the cat.

"For no reason at all," Stanley said, "I decided to fire close behind her. You know. Startle her a little. I was aiming toward the house, of course, but into the snow. I'm a good shot. The old man came out of the house just as I shot. The cat jumped up in the air and ran twice as fast. The old man gave a funny kind of grunt and sat down in the snow and rolled over on his side. I didn't know what happened. I thought maybe he had a heart attack. After we got him in the kitchen then I saw the hole in his shirt and a little blood. So I phoned right away."

"Why didn't you call the doctor first?"

"I tried, but I couldn't get the line."

"You aimed pretty high, didn't you, Wadaslaw?"

"No. I saw the snow kick up from the slug. It must have riccocheted."

Jerry Jackson stared at him. "Off snow?"

"Off snow," Stanley said stolidly.

The troopers and Bob Trable checked exactly where Stanley had been standing. Midway between his footprints and the back door, near the cat tracks, they found the foot-long mark of disturbed snow.

"Let me see that rifle," Dave Devine said.

He checked the clip and he walked over until he was about the same distance from the side of the barn as Stanley had been from the side door of the kitchen. He aimed at the snow halfway to the barn. We saw the snow kick up, and we heard the after-crack of the slug smacking into the side of the barn. He emptied the clip. We walked and looked at the side of the barn. Of the five slugs, three had tumbled and kicked out big splinters, and two had hit squarely and bored through. All were in a pattern about as big around as a bushel basket, and about where a man's chest would be had he been standing against the side of the barn.

"I'll be damned," Jerry said softly.

"The autopsy will check it out for sure," I told them. "If the slug ranges upward from point of impact."

Rose verified Stanley's story. He had been looking out the kitchen window and spoke about the crows, and gone out. She hadn't seen the crows or the cat. She had heard the shot and heard Martin Wadaslaw grunt. Helen and the kids hadn't been in the kitchen.

Harvey Burnbridge took the body to his place in his combination hearse and ambulance. I went back and finished up my office calls and went over to Harvey's place in the evening and opened Martin up. The nippers wouldn't handle those big ribs so I had to saw. The entrance wound was a little raggedy as though the slug was starting to tumble. It had ranged on an upwards course, ripping a hole in the heart sac and coming to rest snug up against the left side of the spinal column. A normal man wouldn't have lasted five minutes.

So that was the end of it. There was no B.C.I. investigation called for. They said Stanley had been pretty damn careless. The old man was buried, artificial leg and all, next to his wife and two of the kids who hadn't lived long enough to grow up. I didn't attend, but I heard that even the Reverend Dudley Simeon had an awkward time putting in a good word for Martin Wadaslaw.

I guess one of the penalties of a country practise is that you get too much time to think, and you get too curious about people and the way their minds work. I spent a lot of time last winter with a book open in my lap, just staring into the fireplace and thinking about Stanley Wadaslaw. Stanley had been trapped. He couldn't arrange to get the old man put away. Rose had no place to go, except move in with Stanley, and that would have left the old man alone, unable to care for himself.

And the little facts kept adding up. Like Helen bringing the three year old boy in saying he fell. But if he fell, he must have bounced, and neither Helen nor Stanley nor Rose would have pummeled a little guy like that.

And I remembered that when Stanley came home from Korea, he was still in uniform and he wore a distinguished marksman's badge. He was known as a dead shot, but the only hunting he ever did was for meat.

Then I remembered another thing about Stanley. He got pretty upset about unnecessary cruelty. There was a story about him knocking some kid off the dock at the fishing lodge when the kid kept right on skinning a smallmouth bass while it was still alive, after Stanley told him to kill it first.

I couldn't see Stanley firing at a cat just to scare it. Or firing in the direction of the house.

On one of the first warm Sundays last spring, I knew I had to get it out of my system. It used up nearly the whole day to find what I was looking for. But I found it in the late afternoon, a mile beyond the Wadaslaw place. It was a big billboard set back from the road, so weathered that you couldn't make out what it used to advertise. On the back of it I found three places where it had been struck repeatedly by small caliber slugs. Some of them had tumbled and torn the old wood. All three groups were pretty well centered, at chest height. I guessed about three hundred rounds had been used up. All had apparently struck at an upward angle.

After Alice had washed up and gone home that night, and I was alone in the big old lonely house, I tried to think it out.

So how had Stanley arranged to have the cat in the right place at the right time.

Then it struck me. The cat didn't have to be there. Just the tracks.

The house was getting chilly. I went over and stirred the fire up and put another log on. Stanley was working hard to get the lodge in shape for the new season. Helen was looking happy. Rose was going to help out at the lodge this season.

And I was a busybody. I was just an old man with too much time on my hands and too much curiosity. It wasn't any of my business. I would put it out of my mind.

But I looked into the flames and I saw the kitchen in the Wadaslaw house. I saw Rose at the sink. She looked out the window and she saw Stanley where he said he would be.

And above the hiss of the flames I seemed to hear Rose say, "Poppa, will you please step out and call Stanley."

The old man grumbled, hoisted his great weight out of the kitchen rocker.

He opened the door slowly and stepped out into the snow.

THE PORTRAITS OF EVE

A Novelette

by
BRUNO FISCHER

I'd been sent to prison, but then I was pardoned. So I had to find out whether or not I was guilty . . .

I WAS BACK IN New York City, back in Greenwich Village, and nothing seemed to have changed in the quiet street where I had lived. None of the old houses had been torn down to make room for sleek apartment buildings. At the corner the cluttered Italian grocery still defied the supermarkets, and a few doors farther Ritchie's restaurant lingered on in its basement.

I paused at Ritchie's to peer into one of the barred windows jutting up above the sidewalk. It was early afternoon and the sun was bright, but inside was perpetual gloom, and the candles stuck into wax-encrusted bottles on the wooden tables were lit. Perhaps the same bottles, grown fat with their wax drippings in the ten years since I used to bring Eve here for antipasto and very dry wine.

I crossed the street. That was no longer easy to do. I had to sidle between parked cars. This, then, was the big change in the street and, in a way, in our civilization—the number of cars. In my time, few of us in Greenwich Village had been able to afford a car. Or had needed one or had wanted one. Now both curbs were crammed with those gleaming, chromed, finned monsters. I crossed the street and there was the house in which I had lived.

Its narrow red-brick front had that look of aging gracefully it had had for most of its sixty or seventy years. And as if I had been away for no more than a day, George, the janitor, sat on the stoop lighting his corncob pipe.

The same pipe, perhaps. The same wizened face. Except that the wispy hair had completely disappeared at the top and the rest had turned gray.

"Hello, George," I said.

His hand froze above the bowl of the pipe, and a breeze blew the match out.

"You look like. . ." he said. "You ain't..."

"I am," I said.

He struck another match. This time he got his

light. He puffed, never taking his eyes from me, and after a minute he said, "I thought you was up for life."

"I suppose they figured that ten years was long enough." I looked over his head at the front door that had always been white and always dirty. "I'd like my old apartment back, George."

He sniffed derisively. "You hear of the housing shortage where you were, Mr. Coulter?"

"I've heard of it. I've also heard that the way to get an apartment is to bribe the superintendent."

I was flattering him. He was a janitor, that was all, of this house and several others on the street. But he would have influence with the landlord.

"People live there," he said. "A writer and his missus."

"Has he money?"

"Writers," he sneered. "Like artists. Always broke."

That was a dig at me, that mention of artists.

"If I induce them to move," I said, "can I have the apartment?"

He shrugged. But he rose to his feet and a covetous gleam jumped into his vein-streaked eyes. "Like you said yourself, Mr. Coulter, it will cost you. I don't guess you got rich up in Sing Sing."

"As a matter of fact, I did," I said. "Not exactly rich, but I made a little money. Will two hundred dollars do?"

His manner turned respectful. "Well, now, Mr. Coulter. It'll make the other tenants nervous having you live here. You know how it is—a man who ..." He decided not to put into words what he had been about to say. He ran his tongue around the stem of his pipe and said, "Five hundred bucks. Remember I have to split with the agent."

He was taking advantage of us, but I had expected that. "Agreed," I said. "Now to persuade the tenants." I started up the steps.

"How you gonna do that?" he called after me.

I said, "The same way I did you," and went into the house.

There were six apartments, two on each floor. As I turned on the second floor landing, a door opened and a chubby little middle-aged woman came out. And again I had that sense of nothing having changed. Here was Louise Livingston Baker, the writer of very minor poetry, coming out of the same door to take a garbage pail down to the basement.

"Hello, Louise," I said.

She had seen me, but she hadn't really looked at me. At the sound of my voice, she jumped.

"Carl Coulter!" she whispered like a moan. And she put up the garbage pail as if to ward me off with it and backed toward the door.

I laughed. "I'm not a ghost, Louise."

But that wasn't what bothered her. She feared me because I was real. She kept backing toward her door, as if not daring to turn around, and I saw what the years had done to her. She had been a pretty little thing in her early thirties—a fragile Dresden doll type. Now she was plump and worn.

"Alexander!" she croaked, tearing open the door through which she had come.

Her husband appeared behind her. He said, "What—" and she ducked past him, the garbage pail swinging wildly, and he saw me in the hall.

"Hello, Alexander," I said.

He came out. "Well, Carl," he said and extended a pudgy hand.

2.

Like his wife, he had put on a lot of weight. Most of his was around his middle. He was a musician—a cellist.

We shook hands and he said, "I've been reading about you in the papers—how you've been painting in—in—"

"Prison. Say it. I'm not sensitive about it."

He nodded. "And your paintings have been selling," he went on. "You've become famous."

"Not so very. But I suppose that helped get me out. I got out yesterday."

"I read that too," he said. "About the move to have you pardoned." He looked away from me. "Well, I'm glad," he muttered.

Past him I saw through the door his wife peering at us.

"Then Louise shouldn't have been so startled to see me," I said.

He stood frowning at nothing in particular, and there was a kind of stifling silence. I felt I had to say something, anything. "Are any of the other tenants still here?" I asked.

"Only Louise and I." Alexander Baker looked up. "We've been doing fairly well too. I'm in the orchestra of a musical comedy that's run three years and may run another. Louise had a book of verse published last winter."

"Swell," I said. And then there was no more to be said. "I'll be seeing you, Alexander."

I moved past him and started up the second flight of stairs. I felt him stare at my back and then I heard him go into his apartment. Halfway up the stairs I stopped.

Those old walls were thin and those two must have been standing near the door and I heard him say, "What was the matter with you, acting like that? I told you he was being pardoned."

"I couldn't help myself," I heard her reply. "Seeing him suddenly in the hall, as if he's never been away, I—I became terrified."

"There's no real harm in him."

"Isn't there?" she said. "Why did he come back? What does he want?"

"A compulsion, maybe," Alexander said grimly.

I continued up the stairs and went to the door

at the rear. There I hesitated, listening to a typewriter clicking beyond the door. I had an impulse to turn and dash down the stairs and out to the street and never return. But that other impulse, the one that had brought me here, was stronger. I knocked.

A young woman opened the door. She was tall and slender, the way they grew them these days. Her hair was cut as if with an ax, which seemed to be the fashion, and she wore dungarees.

"Yes?" she said.

I looked past her. A young man was sitting at a typewriter. His hair was touseled and he had a harrassed expression and he also wore dungarees. A writer, George had said, though this studio apartment was better for an artist. He had stopped typing and was staring my way.

"What is it?" she said to me.

I roused. It was, as I had known it would be, a shock to be back here.

"I have a business proposition to discuss with you and your husband."

"A salesman?" she said suspiciously.

"Not at all. I want to offer you a thousand dollars to move out of this apartment."

The young man rose from his typewriter and joined his wife at the door. "Did I hear you say a thousand dollars?"

"You did. May I come in and discuss my offer?"

"You bet!" he said.

I stepped into the room. That was what the apartment really was, a single large studio room, plus a bathroom and a kitchenette that occupied a shallow indentation in a wall and had no door. It was the same and not the same. The furniture was shabbier and the walls needed a coat of paint.

I kept my eyes away from that part of the room where at the high, wide north window I used to work and Eve used to pose for me.

"Let's see if I follow you," he was saying. "You'll pay us a thousand dollars to move out of here?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I'm an artist," I said. "I lived here many years ago. For personal reasons I'd like to live here again."

They looked at each other. I could see that he, at any rate, was greatly tempted. But she, it turned out, was the practical one of the family.

"Where could we find another apartment?" she said. "And it's so expensive to move."

"Very well," I said. "Two thousand."

I should have been more devious. Obviously he was ready to jump at my offer, but the way I had doubled the amount so quickly started something turning in her head. She put a hand on his arm to restrain him and watched my face. Then, as if a mechanism clicked, her eyes got wide.

"An artist," she said. "What's your name?"

If I did not tell them my name, George would, soon enough. They would find out no matter what. I hoped it would mean nothing to them.

"Carl Coulter," I said.

She did not quite cringe away from me, but I think she would have if we had been alone together. Her hand tightened on her husband's arm and something like horror spread in both their faces.

3.

They knew, of course. George would have told all the tenants who had lived in this building after me. And Alexander and Louise Baker would have talked about it, too. For ten years it would have been a conversation piece among the tenants.

An artist used to live in the third floor rear studio. One afternoon he raped a model who was posing for him in the nude and then strangled her. His name's Carl Coulter and he's serving a life sentence in Sing Sing.

Those the bare outlines, and then the embellishments, repeated over and over throughout the years, told especially with gruesome relish to whoever occupied this apartment. And so these two young people now looked at me in a way that made me want to run and hide.

But I would not be deterred from what I had to do.

"Two thousand dollars," I repeated.

The girl recovered. She even smiled a little.

"We'll move for five thousand dollars," she said.

She was the practical one of the two, all right. She guessed what demon was riding men and was out to cash in on her guess. I would have given her all she demanded—what did money mean?—but my funds were limited. So we haggled, my demon against her greed, and I think her husband was ashamed at profiting so greatly from a fellow man's agony. He stood by morose and uneasy, saying nothing, while the girl and I came to terms. Thirty-five hundred dollars.

That settled, I made myself turn to the north window.

There on the floor, in the clean, sharp afternoon light, I had seen Eve for the last time, lying naked and broken and dead, and the marks of her fingernails had been on my hands and arms.

4.

Ten years ago. But in a way it had started almost a year before that.

I was a high school art teacher in my home town in Indiana. I remember how I hated the job of trying to pound the essentials of perspective into bored young heads. I was a creator, not a teacher; I wanted to devote myself wholly to painting. My chance came when an aunt died and left

me three thousand dollars. Not a fortune, but in the late 1940's enough to live on for a year in reasonable comfort. So when the school term ended, I came east to New York.

I was twenty-six years old.

I worked hard and well in that top floor studio apartment in that faded red-brick house in Greenwich Village. And Andre Mierhof became interested in my paintings.

Andre Mierhof was an art dealer who liked to say that his business was investing in the future of young talent. His midtown gallery showed some of the best of the newcomers. Now and then he displayed one or two of my canvases. Not that he sold anything of mine.

Anyway, not that year.

"Have patience," he used to tell me. He was a bean-pole of a man, with a purr in his voice and the suave manners of a—well, of an art dealer. "Sales may not come for years, or in your lifetime, or at all. An artist who is worth his salt paints because he has to. For the rest, he must have patience that may have to last forever."

I had patience, but only a year's worth. After that my money would be gone.

So I worked and had little time and thought for anything else. Including women. The only friends I made were the Bakers who lived in the apartment below.

Alexander Baker was an unsmiling, prematurely bald man in his middle thirties. He was a first-rate cellist who was not quite a genius, so he had to settle for any orchestra job he could get. Louise Livingston Baker was a fragile, twittering little woman who wrote sticky poetry about nature that was sometimes printed in the women's magazines. I refer to her by all three of her names because she always did, even when she wasn't signing it to a poem. As for Alexander, he was always called that, by her and everybody else—never Al or Alex, but the whole works. What I'm getting at is that they were rather stuffy people.

But I remember liking them well enough. My other neighbors were mostly faceless people for whom I had casual hellos on the stairs. The Bakers I would drop in on quite often, and two or three times a week Alexander would come up to my apartment to play chess.

Nine months of my year passed. I had arrived in New York the first week in July. Early in April Eve Staub came to my studio.

I remember it had rained that morning and had stopped in the afternoon and there was a clean freshness in the air that made you throw the windows open wide. I heard voices muttering outside my door and then there was a knock. George, the janitor, stood outside with a strange girl.

"Did you hire a model, Mr. Coulter?" he asked.

"No."

The girl said, "The name Coulter sounds familiar, though I'm not sure that was the name on the slip of paper."

She was young, hardly in her twenties, and quite pretty. That made her unusual as an artist's model; few of them had any looks to speak of.

"What slip of paper? I said.

"Mr. Mierhof wrote the name and address of an artist down for me. I lost the paper. I remembered the address but not the name."

I laughed. "That's Andre, all right, sending me a model without letting me know."

"Then you don't want me?" She was clearly disappointed.

"Of course I do." There was something about her, a kind of wistfulness as she stood in the hall in flat heels and a short leather jacket, that made me very much want to paint her. Andre Mierhof, who knew everything, had known that she would have a special appeal for me. "Come in," I said.

She took a few steps into the room and stopped and looked at paintings of mine on the walls. Some of them were nudes.

I turned to close the door, and George was leaning in and staring slack-faced at the nudes. Then he looked at the girl, and I could see his eyes imagining her posing for me, and he licked his lower lip.

I said, "Thanks for bringing her up, George," and shut the door in his face.

The girl stood with her hands still in the pockets of her jacket. I asked her name and she told me it was Eve Staub, and I remember how she continued to stand there motionless as if waiting for something to happen.

"You can undress in the bathroom," I told her. "There's a robe on a hook."

"You want me to pose in the nude?" she said.

"I would prefer it."

She turned abruptly, but she moved slowly to the bathroom. I went to my easel and removed the canvas on which I had been painting a still life of flowers in a vase and tacked on sketch paper. I was all set for her when she came out in the blue-and-white flowered silk robe I had for models. She seemed to hesitate outside the bathroom door, then came toward me on bare feet with her head down.

"Please stand on that rug," I said. "Assume any pose that occurs to you. I want to start with preliminary sketches."

She stepped on the rug and stood approximately in the pose of a soldier at attention.

"Your robe," I reminded her.

5.

She muttered, "Of course," and fumbled open the sash. Then she turned her head and seemed

to be looking at something outside the window as she pulled the robe down over her shoulders and out of the arms and let it drop to the floor. She had a beautiful body, young and firm, every line of it clean and concise.

I sketched rapidly. I tore off the top sheet and scowled at it. She was too rigid and maybe too beautiful. I had made her seem as sleek and superficial as a woman in a beer advertisement.

"You're not relaxed," I told her.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Relax. Put one hand on your hair and the other on your hip. That's a corny pose, but it may loosen you up. You're—" I broke off as something occurred to me. "Is this the first time you've ever posed?"

"I've posed many times."

"In the nude?"

"Oh, yes. At the Art Students' League. But lately they haven't had much work for me. I'm lucky when I get a class a week." She flushed. "The truth is I never posed like this for just one person."

"Is there any difference between posing for a whole class and posing for me?"

"I guess there shouldn't be." She lowered her eyes—a very demure nude. "But I guess there is. When there's a whole roomful of artists, it's somehow more impersonal."

"Look," I said. "The relationship of artist and model is strictly impersonal no matter what the setting. You ought to know that."

"Oh, I do."

"Then why are you afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid. Not really."

"Just a little shy?"

She smiled, and she had a wonderful smile, with a lot of wistfulness in it. "I'm sure I'll be all right now," she said.

I resumed sketching.

After I had done a half a dozen sketches, she put on the robe and we had a break for tea. As we sat at the table, she told me a little about herself. She was a senior at New York University. She lived in Brooklyn with her parents. Her father was a garment cutter who was sacrificing greatly to send her through college. Several months ago she had started to pose at the League to earn some money on her own.

We returned to work for another hour. When she had dressed, I paid her the two dollars for the two hours.

"Will you come again tomorrow?" I said.

"I don't think I can. I have a late class."

"Can't you find a couple of hours? I'm anxious to get started on an oil portrait."

She considered and then said, "I can be here at seven-thirty and walk over to the school for my ten o'clock class. Will that be too early for you?"

"Not at all."

I accompanied Eve to the door and she gave me her wistful smile and left.

I remember how afterward I sat down with the sketches I had done of her and looked at them for a long time. I was deciding on a pose for the oil portrait I would start tomorrow. But that wasn't the only reason I looked at the sketches. I was looking at her.

That was the beginning, and from there on the end rushed at us.

6.

There was hardly a day that Eve did not pose for me for a couple of hours and often longer. She never came on Sundays, so Saturdays were the only days when she would not have to rush in before or between or after her classes at N. Y. U. and rush out again after too short a time. She would stay a good part of every Saturday, and she would make lunch for us in the tiny kitchenette or we would go down to Ritchie's basement restaurant and linger long over antipasto and wine before returning up to my studio to resume work.

I remember how completely wasted were the Sundays and the weekdays when for one reason or another she could not come. I could no longer work on anything else. I moped in the studio and took long walks along the river and waited for the next day.

April slipped by. I had finished two full-length portraits of her.

I remember the afternoon I started the third. I had her half-reclining on cushions—a classic Venus pose.

"Aren't you getting tired of the same model?" she commented.

"Tired?" I said, picking up a piece of charcoal. "Why should I?"

"I'd think you'd want variety."

"Cezanne painted the same bowl of fruit over and over. He had something new to say each time he did."

Eve laughed. Her laughter was softly musical and completely relaxed. Reclining on the cushions in nothing but a string of beads, she was now wholly at ease with me.

"I'm not sure how to take being compared to a bowl of fruit," she said. "Though I suppose to an artist they're all the same—a woman or some fruit or a landscape."

I opened my mouth to say something, but I didn't say it. I sketched in her figure on the canvas.

April slipped by and it was May and I had finished the third painting of her. I remember I was putting it into a temporary frame, to hang on the wall with the other two, when Eve came dressed out of the bathroom and stood watching me.

"I suppose now you're through with me," she said.

Through with her! The thought frightened me.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well, you *are* finished. You won't need me any more."

"I have another in mind." My voice got anxious. "You'll keep coming, won't you?"

"If you want me to. I can use the money."

And I was spending a lot more on models—rather, on one model—than I had planned to. At this rate my funds would never last out the twelve months. But at the moment that was a small matter.

"Then I'll see you tomorrow," I said, going to the door with her.

"I'm afraid I can't come tomorrow."

Something like panic seized me. "But tomorrow's Saturday."

"I'm sorry. I have a date."

"With a boy?"

"It's a usual thing for girls to have dates with boys, isn't it?"

It was a usual thing, but somehow it hadn't occurred to me that she had any kind of life outside of college and her home and my studio. Maybe I hadn't let that occur to me. I hated the boy, whoever he was.

"Can't you break the date?"

She put her hand on the doorknob. "No, I can't," she said crisply. "Do you want me at three Monday afternoon?"

"Of course."

Saturday, then, was a ruined and empty day, and so was Sunday. Then at last it was Monday afternoon, and I had good reason to remember clearly that day and the next.

Eve arrived at a few minutes after three. For this fourth painting I posed her seated in a chair, one arm draped over the back to give her torso a three-quarters perspective, and I stuck a rose in her hair. I hardly begun when there was a knock on the door. I was annoyed; anybody at the door, even if I did not admit him, caused complications. Because there was only that one room, she had to break her pose and go to the trouble of putting on her robe. When she had done so, I went to the door.

Andre Mierhof, impeccable in tweeds, stood in the hall.

"I haven't heard from you in some time, Carl, so I thought I'd drop in and see how you are doing." He stepped over the threshold and saw Eve coming toward us. "Ah, Miss Staub. I can see Carl finally got around to using you."

They shook hands, and Eve said, "I haven't had a chance to thank you for sending me to him. Mr. Coulter has been very generous."

"Actually he should thank me. A model so lovely is by no means—" Andre Mierhof broke off. He was staring at the three portraits of Eve on the wall. "Ah!" he said, going close to them. He turned to me, smiling. "Generous, indeed. I see what she meant. You seem to be immersed in the subject, Carl."

"Any objection?" I snapped.

"Who am I to object? An artist must choose his own subject, and you've done so well with this one." He studied the paintings some more. "I like them. I like them very much. But I see you are working. Don't let me disturb you."

I didn't say anything. Eve was lighting a cigarette.

"Go on, go on," he said. "Certainly you don't mind me watching you."

"I don't," I said. "But there's Miss Staub to be considered."

"Nonsense!" he said. "I've observed Miss Staub posing before. I met her when I visited an artist friend—you know John Yake, don't you?—at his class at the Art Students' League, and she was posing. This is no different. Is it, Miss Staub?"

Eve merely crushed out her cigarette and strode over to the chair and removed the flowered silk robe and resumed the pose. She was a lot more at ease about it than she had been with me alone the first time. And Andre Mierhof seated himself halfway across the room and watched me and watched her.

I didn't like it. Three was nothing wrong with him being there, but I didn't like it. Irritation grew in me. After only a few minutes I turned from the easel and said, "That will be all for the day, Eve."

She gave me a surprised look, but made no comment.

When she was dressed, I paid her for two full hours. She said good-by to Andre Mierhof and to me and the door closed behind her, and I stood scowling at his back. He was again studying those three paintings.

"Sorry," I said, "but I couldn't work with anybody watching me."

"Was that the trouble?" He smiled his very smooth smile. "Carl, I'd like to show these three pictures in my gallery."

"No."

"What?" he said as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"I said no."

"I'll buy them. As speculation."

"I'm not ready to part with them."

"Then sell me one."

"No."

He sighed. "I never quite get used to the idiosyncrosies of artists. No hard feelings, Carl. Any time you change your mind . . ."

"If I ever do," I said, "I'll let you know."

I remember that before he left he took one more long look at the three nudes of Eve Staub.

7.

That evening Alexander Baker came up to play chess, as he often did. He brought his wife with him. Though I was often in their apartment, Louise had not been in mine more than once or twice.

"I'll stay only a minute," she twittered. "I simply must see your pictures of that charming Eve Staub."

The Bakers had met Eve twice. Once when we had been in Ritchie's, they had come in and joined us at our table. Another time I had been accompanying Eve down to the street when we had met them coming up the stairs and they had invited us in for coffee. Of course they had found her charming.

"Those there on the wall," I told her.

Louise looked from one canvas to the other, and I could see the fragile lines of her face harden. She turned away.

"Don't you agree with me they're works of genius?" Alexander asked her. Rather anxiously, I thought.

"I think they're lewd," she said.

I was deeply shocked. I had not suspected she had so nasty a mind. I had nothing to say.

"Now, Louise," Alexander said miserably, "there's no need to insult Carl."

Her mouth was primly tight. She opened it. "I consider it an insult to me to show me such vulgarities." She relented a little. "I realized I asked to see them. I am not blaming you, Carl; I am afraid I will never understand men." She twittered again. "Now I'll leave you two to your game."

She went, and for a moment there was an uncomfortable silence. Then Alexander said, "I should have stopped her from coming up. I was afraid she would react like that. I really believe they're great works of art, Carl."

"Thanks."

I set up the chessboard. The first move was his, but he didn't make it. He twisted on his chair to look at the portraits.

"You're in love with that girl," he said.

"Am I?"

"It's conveyed by every stroke of your brush. Do you mind my mentioning this?"

"I'm not ashamed of how I feel about her," I said.

Alexander moved a pawn and stroked his bald pate and said, "Is she your mistress?"

I managed to restrain myself from reaching across the table and hitting him.

He saw what was in my face. "No offense, Carl," he said quickly. "But you admit you love her, and—well, she does pose in the nude for you."

"She's a model and I'm an artist," I said. "I never as much as put a hand on her."

"I'm a blathering idiot! I apologize most sincerely. Forget I said anything."

We played. It was not a good game. It ended, as I remember, in a draw, and we did not play a second game. He seemed glad to get away and I was glad to see him leave.

I could not forget what he had said. I thought about it during the restless night. My love for Eve showed in my paintings for everybody to see. What kind of a man was I to make love only with paint on canvas? This was a kind of sickness. I was flesh and blood and she was flesh and blood.

Next day I touched Eve for the first time. I put my hands on her shoulders and kissed her.

It was late afternoon. She had come at three o'clock after a class, and it was six o'clock and she was about to leave. I waited until she was dressed before I kissed her.

I remember how she jerked her head aside and drew away from me. I held onto her shoulders, saying, "Eve, I love you."

"Let me go!"

"Eve, you don't understand. I want you to marry me."

She broke away from me. I went after her. I threw my arms about her. I was possessed by my need of her.

She did not struggle. She stood limply within my embrace and said, "Carl, I'm in love with somebody else."

My arms fell from her.

"Who?" I said.

"A boy who goes to N. Y. U. with me. We're going to be married."

I stared at her. "You never mentioned him."

"There's no reason why I should have."

No reason. I had been no more to her than an employer—a man who hired her for a job of work.

I said dully, "When will you be married?"

"Early next month, as soon as we both graduate." She picked up her school books. "I'm afraid you've made it impossible for me to pose for you any more."

"Eve, in heaven's name! At least let me finish this one. You can't walk out on me."

"You've made it so—so personal."

"Eve, I swear it will be just the way it was before. I give you my solemn word."

She chewed her lower lip. "We certainly can use the money," she said, speaking more to herself than to me. "We have so little to get started with. Every bit will help." She looked up, and her tone and manner were business-like. "I'll be here tomorrow at eight. I'll be able to give you all morning."

So we continued, but it was different. She did not chatter the way she used to while posing and we no longer went down to Ritchie's restaurant. We were more remote than we had been that first day.

But I was grateful to have her at all—to be able to have her there and love her with my eyes and with my paint brushes.

8.

In the middle of May my money gave out.

I had not expected it to happen so soon and I had been careless about keeping my checkbook up to date. There was a day when a check to the electric company bounced, and I remember how I went into a sweat of terror at the realization that all I had to my name were the very few dollars in my pocket. I was not so much concerned about paying my bills and even eating. Each one of the dollars I had left meant an hour of Eve. When they were gone, as they would be in a couple of days, Eve would be gone.

I put in a long distance call to my brother who had a small lumber yard in Indiana. He complained that business was bad, but in the end promised to send me fifty dollars—a lot less than I had asked for. Still, that would be enough to pay Eve for the rest of the month if I cut down my other expenses to the bone. Meanwhile, until that money arrived, every cent I had would have to be reserved for Eve.

There happened to be very little food in the apartment. I finished it off next day and went to bed hungry. The day after that I had a couple of slices of stale bread and some tea and then there was nothing left. I thought of going down to the Bakers for a meal, but ever since Louise had called my portraits of Eve lewd I had stayed away from that apartment. I was hungry, but I had money for Eve. I paid her two dollars one day and three dollars the next day, and then I had exactly seven cents left. I was sure the check from brother would arrive in the morning.

At ten o'clock next morning I was waiting on the stoop for the mailman. Usually he arrived at ten after ten. That morning he was late. I rushed to him and he shuffled through his letters for the building. Nothing for me. No check from my brother.

I remember standing in the hot May sunlight and hearing my heart thump. Eve was due at eleven. If I did not pay her today, would she come back? There was so little time anyway before she graduated from N. Y. U. and got married and would never again pose for me. Was I to lose even those few remaining days?

I had seven cents. In those days a nickel was enough for the subway. I rushed uptown to Andre Mierhof's apartment on West End Avenue. Though it was a quarter to eleven, I had to rouse him out of bed. I asked him for money.

"My offer stands," he purred. "I'll buy one or all of those three nudes. Or are there more than three now?"

"I'll not part with them."

Standing lean and dapper in a silk dressing gown, he shrugged. "Then evidently you don't want money."

"All I'm asking for is five dollars till tomorrow."

He frowned at me and went for his wallet and took out a bill. I snatched it from him and ran.

My legs wobbled as I went down the subway stairs. I was weak with hunger, but I had no time to stop to eat. It was eleven already, and Eve might leave if she didn't find me in.

George was bringing out the ash cans as I ran up the stoop. He called after me, "That model of yours went up a while ago." When I plunged into my studio, I had no breath left in me.

I had left my door unlocked and I found her leafing through an art magazine. I gasped out apologies. She merely nodded and went into the bathroom to undress and I at once set to work assembling my brushes and paints. That fourth portrait was almost finished.

I remember the silence between us as she sat, and I remember how utterly fatigued I felt as I stood at the easel. I had run too much and not eaten and my legs would hardly hold me up. I remember putting down my palette and taking a step toward her and Eve starting to rise from the chair and saying in an oddly constricted tone, "Carl!" What happened after that I cannot remember clearly. There was a kind of shimmering vagueness, and we were coming together somehow, she infinitely beautiful in her nakedness, and as from far off there was her voice again, crying, "Carl!" and her voice faded and she faded and for a while there was nothing.

There was nothing and then there was something, as if I had been in a dark pit and was emerging up into the light. I kept pushing myself up from the pit—an actual physical effort that I realized was the slow and laborous task of rising to my feet. I remember myself standing, then, and swaying and looking down at Eve.

She was very still. She lay sprawled on the floor in a grotesque and obscene position. Her eyes were wide open, staring without sight at the ceiling. And, God help me, I could see her tongue.

I knew she was dead.

I became aware of scratches on my bare forearms and on the backs of my hands—deep furrows tinged with blood. I bent and saw her fingernails broken and I saw blood on the tips of her fingers. My blood.

I did not remember leaving my apartment, but I remember being on the floor below and pounding on the door of the Bakers' apartment. There was no answer. I descended another flight of stairs. George was sitting on the stoop filling his corncob pipe.

"George," I heard myself say, "call a policeman."

9.

The trial was short. I remember how it seemed that almost before it began the jury was filing in

and I could see by their faces what the verdict would be.

The scratches were what did it, mainly. Flecks of skin and blood were found under her fingernails, and the blood was the same type as mine. And when I took the stand for my own defense, I could not say that I had not done it. I could only say that I did not believe I could have done it.

"I loved her," I blurted out. "Would I have killed her when I loved her?"

I remember how the prosecutor had smiled at that, as if my words had assured his victory over me. He made me admit that I had known she was to marry another man within three weeks. Later he devoted much of his summation to the jury to that. He made a great deal of the fact that I, who loved her and had been rejected by her, continued to see her every day in my apartment in the nude. Those three portraits of her, three finished and one nearly finished, were there in the courtroom, and I remember shrinking into myself as the prosecutor showed them once more to the jury. She had posed for me like this, he said, and the time was nearing when she was to marry another and would be out of my life forever, and on that morning, on or about eleven-thirty, I had leaped at her and raped her and finally strangled her.

The jury was convinced beyond reasonable doubt. And could I, myself, not be convinced?

I was given a life sentence.

The first time my brother came to visit me in Sing Sing he told me that Andre Mierhof had asked him to let him have all my pictures for a one-man show. My brother had shipped everything of mine to his home in Indiana, including the four portraits of Eve, which had been evidence and after the trial had been turned over to him as my next of kin. I knew Andre Mierhof wanted to cash in on my notoriety. I didn't care. I told my brother to let Andre Mierhof have whatever he wanted—except those four portraits.

Shortly after that Andre Mierhof visited me. He wanted the portraits.

"Never," I said.

"You'll never see them again," he said. "Why not let others?"

"Never. It was bad enough having them drooled over in the courtroom."

When he was gone, I thought of writing my brother to destroy them. But I didn't.

The warden was kind to me. I was, I suppose, a model prisoner, and after a while he let me have the materials with which I could resume painting. I began to do my best work in prison. I became known. I sold. Life was not unpleasant. I was behind bars, but I was doing what I most wanted to do.

I had plenty of time to think, and I knew what I would do if I ever got out.

I got out after ten years, pardoned by the governor.

It took three weeks for the young couple who occupied my studio—always I had thought of it as mine!—to find another apartment and move out. I moved in, and the first thing I did was open the box containing the four portraits of Eve. I had had my brother send them to me from Indiana where all this time they had been in his attic. I hung three on the wall and placed the unfinished one on the easel.

Everything was as it had been. Except that Eve was long dead.

10.

Andre Mierhof came to see me. He stepped through the door and saw the three portraits on the wall and the fourth on the easel and stood stock still.

"What are you after, Carl?" he said.

"I'm not sure. Maybe to try to pick up the pieces."

He put a fatherly hand on my shoulder. "Carl, this is a haunted place for you. You'll be living with ghosts."

"They're my ghosts," I said.

"One can't live in the past. That's a kind of madness. Carl, let me help you." He was an elderly, gray-haired man now, but the purr had never left his voice. "Let me take those pictures off your hands. They're no good for you."

I laughed out loud. "You never give up, do you, Andre?"

He laughed with me, which was like him.

Later that afternoon I went down to the floor below and knocked on a door. It opened halfway and Louise Baker's aging face appeared. I think she would have slammed the door if I had not held my shoulder against it.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"I'd like to see Alexander."

"He's not in."

Clearly she was scared sick of me. I was not an old friend. I was a man who murdered women.

"I want to ask him to play chess with me this evening," I said.

"He works evenings. He plays in an orchestra."

"Then he must have free time during the day. Would you mind telling him to come to see me?"

"Yes, yes," she said, continuing her frantic pressure on the door.

I stepped back and the door slammed. I heard the lock being turned.

I stood in the hall for I don't know how long before I went down to the street. I made a tour of Village bookstores, asking for a recently published volume by Louise Livingston Baker. It wasn't easy to find, but after a while I did. It was called,

My Heart Goes Out, and that night I read it. I had never read such dull slop, all about the birds in the air and the flowers in the fields and her immortal soul. All the same, I read every line.

Alexander did not come up to play chess, not next day and not any day. Maybe he came while I was out. More likely she hadn't given him my message.

I was out a great deal that week. I visited model agencies and art schools and artists and photographers; I went everywhere and to everybody who had anything to do with models. Whenever I heard of a girl in the profession who at all resembled the description I gave, I got in touch with her. Most of the girls were all wrong. Those who were not wrong were not right enough.

Eventually I found her by hunting through back issues of photography magazines. There was a full-page shot of her in a brief bathing suit against a background of sky and sea. I looked up the photographer and obtained the model's name and address. Luckily she lived in the city. I phoned her and made an appointment with her at my studio the following afternoon. Her name was Margery Dawson.

I was somewhat disappointed when she walked in. She was taller and heavier and her face was too healthy-looking for wistfulness. But when she had her clothes off and assumed posing positions, I thought she would do. I had an artist's eye and memory, but for others ten years would be a long time to remember exactly.

I did not touch charcoal or brush. I told her to dress, and when she had done so I had a long talk with her. I had trouble persuading her. What did it was the substantial fee I offered her. I had been learning, since I had got out of prison, what money could accomplish.

Even though I had talked Margery Dawson into it, she left obviously somewhat uneasy about me. I would not have been surprised if she had not returned next day. But she did.

When she arrived, I phoned Andre Mierhof and asked him to be at my place at four o'clock. He got there at ten to five, which was about par in punctuality for him. He came in, saying, "What's so all-fired urgent that you—" and choked on the rest of the sentence.

She was posed in the pose he had seen ten years ago for that fourth and unfinished painting, sitting partly turned with her arm over the back of the chair and a rose in her hair.

Slowly he let out his breath. "For a moment I could have sworn she was—" He worked up a smile. "So you are finishing that fourth portrait!"

I said, "I thought you'd be interested," and went to the easel. I picked up palette and brush and made gestures at the canvas, but actually I added nothing that mattered. I could not, of course, ever finish it, for no model could take Eve's place.

Andre Mierhof did not stay long, he did not, as he had that other time, sit and watch my model. He seemed in a hurry to go. I accompanied him out to the hall where we could speak in private.

"You can't fool me, Carl," he said. "You're not painting her." And he repeated the question he had asked a week ago. "What are you after?"

11.

This time I told him. "The truth," I said.

"You think you'll find it here?"

"Where else?"

He sighed. "What do you mean by the truth?"

"I must know if I could have killed the only girl I had ever loved."

He said, "Suppose you find out you hadn't. What good can it do you now? Can it bring her back to life? Can it bring you back your ten years?"

"I have to know," I said.

He gave my upper arm a pat and started down the stairs. I returned to the studio.

Margery Dawson had put on her robe and was looking through Louise Livingston Baker's book of poems on the table.

"The sight of you startled him all right," I told her. "He was the important test."

I went to the phone and called up George in his basement room and said a pipe in the bathroom had burst. That done, I told the girl to resume her pose on the chair. Within a few minutes there was a knock on the door and I sang out, "Come in."

George entered with a heavy toolbox. He turned to me at the easel, thereby turning to the model also, and his jaw dropped. That was all that happened. He was merely an old man gawking at a naked young woman.

"Well, George, what is it?" I said.

"I come to fix the pipe."

"What pipe?"

"You phoned you have a busted pipe."

"Are you out of your mind? It must have been somebody else. Don't stand there. You're embarrassing the lady."

He left dragging his feet.

When the door had closed behind him, I wiped my sweaty hands on my pants. I felt suddenly very tired. The girl sat with her body slack and her face pale. She seemed to be exhausted, too.

"Just one more," I told her. "It's close to dinner time. He's sure to be home.

I dialed a number on the phone. Louise Baker answered.

"I'd like to speak to Alexander," I said.

"Who is this, please?"

"Carl Coulter."

"He's not—"

"Put him on!" I cut her off. "Let him speak for himself."

Perhaps she needed to be shouted at. She said weakly, "Just a moment," and after a pause Alexander's voice was on the line.

"What is it, Carl?"

"Come up to my place at once."

"I can't. Louise will be serving dinner soon."

"Something has happened," I said. "It concerns you vitally."

"What?"

"I can't tell you on the phone. I advise you to hurry."

The line sounded empty. I was beginning to think he was no longer on it when I heard his voice. "I'll be right up," he said.

He wasn't right up. I had never thought that minutes could be so long in passing. I kept wiping my hands on my pants and Margery Dawson sat silent and pale and huddled on the chair.

Then there were footsteps on the stairs, followed by tapping on the door.

At that moment I decided to do it a bit differently. I whispered to her to lie down on the floor. She stared at me in bewilderment.

"Do as I say," I whispered harshly. "Quick!" She obeyed. "No, sprawled out on your back. That's it, but looser, as if you were dead. Good enough."

The tapping on the door grew louder. I stretched out on the floor near the girl. We lay half a dozen feet apart, the naked girl limp as a bundle of rags and I. That was the way it must have been ten years ago.

"Come in," I called.

I heard the door open. From where I lay, I could see only the stubby legs, but I could imagine the rest of him, the potbelly and the always solemn face and the glistening bald scalp. I saw the feet move. They took two or three hesitant steps into the room, then they stopped.

He screamed like a woman.

The feet turned and plunged out through the open door.

12.

In a few minutes I followed him. I knocked on the door of the apartment below mine. Nobody came to admit me. The knob turned in my hand; the door wasn't locked. I went in.

Alexander sat hunched on the sofa and Louise stood over him. Both were turned to the door, their heads and torsos held in a kind of helpless immobility as they had watched it open and now stared at me enter. His face was shattered, but hers was like stone.

"What are you doing to him?" she said to me.

I spoke to him, not to her. "Does she know?"

Alexander nodded as if he were unaware of nodding.

I closed the door and stood with my back against it. "I suppose she was here with you when Eve banged on the door that morning. She saw you leave with Eve and she saw you come running back; and later, after I had found that Eve was dead had come down and knocked on your door, you kept Louise from opening it. You couldn't let anybody see you, not me then and not the police when they arrived. Because of the scratches on your hands and arms. You had to keep under cover till they healed. But Louise had seen you come and go and had seen those scratches and had known what they meant."

Louise said, "I knew nothing. There was nothing to know."

I ignored her. I continued to speak only to Alexander.

"I passed out that morning while Eve posed for me," I said. "I was weak with hunger and I had done too much running about and I fainted. Eve got frightened when she couldn't revive me. She ran for help. Whom would she go to in this building? Not to total strangers when she knew there were friends of mine. Maybe to George. There was always that possibility. During all my thinking about what must have happened, I had to consider George—that she had gone for him first or that she had gone for him after she had not found you at home. But this was the first door she would have knocked at. You were closer than George, and you were my friends. So she knocked and you were in and you went up to my apartment with her. Ther you found that I had merely fainted. And Eve was very close to you, wearing only that thin silk robe. You knew what she was like under the robe. You had seen my paintings of her many times. I remember how during our chess games you used to keep glancing at them. And there she was and I was unconscious and you—"

"Stop it!" he burst out. "Haven't I gone through hell for ten years?"

I found that, after all, I did not hate him so very much.

"I've been reading the poetry of Louise Livingston Baker," I said. "They are all about things, never about people. They are full of love for nature, but never for a man. There's no blood in them. No sex."

"I do not write of lewdness," Louise Livingston Baker said stiffly.

I looked at her. "Poor Alexander!" I said. "I remember you called my paintings of Eve lewd." I looked at him. "It could not have been easy on you, Alexander, living with a woman who was too pure, too disembodied, to consider sex anything but lewdness."

"Yes," he said in a small voice, and he put his head in his hands. Then he looked up. "Something came over me. As you said, Carl, there had been those pictures of her whenever I had been in your apartment, and then that morning there she was

kneeling beside me and the robe fell partly open." He uttered a broken sob. "God help me, I didn't know what I was doing."

I said, "But you knew what you were doing afterward when you choked her to death."

"I had to. She was going to scream. I held her by the throat to prevent her from screaming. I didn't want to . . . I didn't mean to . . ."

His voice went to pieces.

I said, "But you meant to do what you did after she was dead. You saw the scratches on your skin and you saw your blood on her fingers. You knew the police would look through the building for somebody who had been scratched. You had to keep that from happening. You had to make it appear that I was the one against whom she had struggled, so you made those scratches on my hands and arms with your own fingernails. As it turned out, luck was with you because we were both the same blood type. Type O, the most common. Oh, yes, you were lucky. I was in jail and you were outside. But I wonder how lucky you really were. How bad were those years, Alexander? How deep in hell were you?"

He was about to tell me, but Louise didn't let him.

"You've said too much already," she scolded him as she would a small boy. "He has no evidence. He can't hurt you."

Alexander laughed in a way that was not nice to hear. "Can't hurt me!" he muttered. "Dear God, can't hurt me!"

"Exactly," she snapped. "Bear that in mind. He has no evidence." She turned to me, and that little, chubby woman stood like a rock in that room. "Please leave," she said to me. "You must see that you can prove nothing. You can do nothing."

Without a word, I went out through the door and back to my studio and the four portraits of Eve.

Louise was right—I couldn't do anything. But Alexander could. During the night he cut his throat.

Job Completed

When the American Lithuanian Club in Cambridge, Mass., was broken into the second time, the burglars took $700 and the burglar alarm. They also took the set of tools they had hastily abandoned on the first attempt two weeks before.

Oversight

Harry J. Diacou, Chicago, told police that two bandits had robbed him. They took 6,000 Mexican pesos, 1,000 Japanese yen, 4,000 Philippine pesos, 20 Porto Rican dollars and 500 Cuban dollars, all in currency that he had been saving for his young son. But the robbers overlooked $20 in U. S. bills that were in another pocket.

Easy Does It

Sheriff William Harris, of Savannah, Ga., presented evidence to Chatham County officials that his jail was in "an advanced state of physicial deterioration." Using a fish skinner, potato peeler and a meat saw, four prisoners cut through screening and bars, then dropped 25 feet to freedom on a rope made of aprons and bags.

Rose hated her aunt. That was why Rose made love to the young drunk . . .

by

MIKE BRETT

the babe and the bum

In her nightgown Rose walked quietly to the window that overlooked the back alley and saw him in the lightening morning shadows. She watched him tilt the pint to his mouth, his hands shaking and drain almost half the bottle. Some of the red wine had spilled on his chin.

She had seen him for the past three mornings when the hissing and clanking of the radiator had awakened her, and she had heard him stumbling over the littered debris. Rose thought that he was no more than twenty or twenty-one, but he already had the leathery look of a stew-bum. While she studied him he turned his back to her and was sick against the wall.

Rose watched and smiled.

In the adjoining room she could hear her Aunt Midge snoring heavily, her breathing an uneven series of gasps and pig-like grunts.

Always when she thought of her Aunt, Rose would feel sick. She saw the flabbiness and her Aunt's enormous breasts that heaved and shook whenever Midge walked or made a sudden movement. Rose felt her own firm sixteen year old

body and thought how different she was than Midge. And there was the unwashed body smell and the purple print dress that Aunt Midge never changed.

Outside in the alley the bum had taken another drink, his breath exhaling into white vapor in the morning cold. Rain had started to fall, big hard slanty drops. And now, Rose quietly opened the window and the rain pinged and splashed on the sill, the cold sending a chill into the room and she shivered in her nightgown.

In his drunken stupor he hadn't noticed the sound of the window opening and Rose quietly called to him. "Hey, mister."

Startled, he spun around and looked up at the first floor window, and then seeing Rose in her nightgown a foolish smile split his face.

He swayed. "Hya baby, whasamattah?"

His thick tongued voice was too loud and she hurriedly put her forefinger to her lips urging silence. She leaned out of the window watching with amusement as his eyes caught a glimpse of her smooth white flesh beneath the transparent gown. She let him look for a minute and then she moved her shoulders forward sensuously.

His mouth fell slack, a stupid blank expression crossing his face. The rain was stronger now, the wind whipping it through the alley in gusts that bounced off the brick alley walls. Rain ran off his head pasting down his hair and ran in rivulets into the soiled white collar of his shirt.

"Meet me under the stairs, in the hallway," Rose whispered. "I'll be right down."

He nodded agreement, "Okay baby, I'll wait for you."

When she shut the window Rose wasn't sure but she thought she had seen him smirk. She listened for Midge. And now she threw a duster over her nightgown and noiselessly went out into the hall leaving the door unlatched. He was under the stairs his eyes boozy bloodshot, his breath foul, and his face an eager mask of anticipation.

Rose loosened her robe and found herself shaking as she went to him. She stood before him, watching his eyes hungrily run up and down her body. Silently she listened for sounds in the building; they'd have to be fast, real fast, and quiet. Suddenly then, Rose leaned forward, the roundness of her body flattening against his soggy clothes. She could feel his breath and his mouth kissing her face and her neck, his hand shaking uncontrollably, tearing at the straps on her gown.

His voice was thick and hoarse, "Come on baby."

"Don't, don't hurt me," she whispered.

And then they both heard it, somebody's footsteps on the stairs directly over them.

She sprang away from him and stood silent, her heart pounding painfully until the sound of the steps grew faint and they were no longer heard.

He reached for her again, but now doors were opening and slamming. The people in the building were on their way to work.

He was pawing her again, "You're nice, baby. C'mon."

Rose put her hands on his chest and pushed. "It's too late, it's too late," she said and she could feel the excitement raging within him.

But his arm had circled the small of her back and was pulling her in . . . in, the other hand groping, exploring. Her mouth struck with the fury and the swiftness of a snake on his cheek, violent and hard. His hands fell away, "What the . . . ?" and he felt the purple teeth marks and his florid face sobered and then became angry white. "Damn you!"

Rose hurriedly backed away from him, into the hall, out of his reach. She giggled nervously. "You asked for that. Come back in an hour. Can you get in through the window? I don't want anybody to see you going in the front door. You'll need a box, or something to stand on. I'll be alone. I'll be waiting for you."

His sullen face relaxed and his hand fingered the teeth marks. "What did you do that for? Jeez, you're a hot tempered gal."

She studied him for a moment. "I do everything that way. Gone man, all the way. You coming back?"

The drunk grinned. "You can't keep me away. I'll be back in an hour."

Rose turned and walked back into the apartment and locked the door. A sense of exultation and power came over her. She hummed, she laughed to herself, she felt like singing. She removed her duster and the nightgown, and she stood before the cheap distorted door mirror and looked at herself. I'm beautiful, she thought, not at all like Aunt Midge. Ever since she had left the girls House of Correction and gone to live with her Aunt Midge, Midge had hated her. Midge had been jealous of Rose and Joey. That was why Midge was always checking and had accused her of being a slut; just because she had been necking with Joey in the back of his car. And if Joey hadn't been so stupid and parked so close to the house, even though it was dark, Midge would never have spotted them. Besides, nothing had really happened. Why couldn't her Aunt leave them alone. She loathed Midge.

There was another time, when Midge said she was going to play bingo, and Joey had come over to the apartment when she left. They had gone into the bedroom and Joey was so wild about her, so crazy wild about her. She'd do anything for Joey. Midge had come back into the apartment and they hadn't heard her come in. She hadn't gone to play bingo, instead she had stopped at the corner bar and had a couple. Then Aunt Midge had found her with Joey.

Midge was so loud. "You cheap little whore.

You aint nothin! Turn my back on you for a minute and I find you in the bedroom with this bum." She screamed hysterically at Joey, "Young punk! I know who you are. She's a minor and you're not going to get away with it. I'm going to get a cop." And then she had charged out of the apartment.

Joey had dressed and had left. The police had arrested him later and they had taken her to the hospital. And they had put Joey on probation after the doctors had examined her. Now Midge wouldn't allow her out at night.

Noiselessly Rose walked to Midge's room and now she turned the knob very slowly and swung the door open. Midge was still sleeping, the slatted light from the window blinds streaming across her face and the rumpled bed covers.

And now Rose walked into the kitchen and then under the sink she found the hammer she was looking for. Strangely enough she felt calm. Midge was still snoring in her bedroom and now Rose stood next to her over the bed. And suddenly the hammer was shaking in her hand and her mouth felt dry. Nervously she ran the tip of her tongue over her lips and then without thinking she swung the hammer down with all her strength; down into Midge's face. A sharp sucked in gasp came from Midge's mouth and her hands opened and closed spasmodically. Then Rose brought the hammer down again in a swift murderous arc that ended with a bone crushing sound in the center of Midge's forehead.

For a brief moment Rose stood poised, the bloody splattered hammer ready, and as she watched, Midge's clenched fists fell open and she knew it was over.

She felt her legs tremble and the panic rising in her breast, and she almost dropped the hammer and ran. But in that split second she grew calm again and then she walked into the bathroom and put the hammer into the sink and turned the faucet on. She was careful to wet the handle only. The water ran red, then pink and when it ran clear she wiped the hammer handle carefully with tissue. Rose disposed of the tissue when the hammer was dry. Then she washed her hands and she looked carefully at herself in the bathroom mirror for blood-stains. Abruptly she carried the hammer into the kitchen and placed it on the table.

Until this moment her actions had been mechanical but now her thoughts raced ahead. It had worked exactly as she had planned it. Her Aunt was dead and the drunk would soon be climbing into her own bedroom through the window. And when he did she had a special request for him. He'd surely go into the kitchen and pick up the hammer to nail up a curtain rod for her. She'd wait until he had picked up the hammer and his prints were on the handle. He'd be so excited he wouldn't notice the blood on the head of the hammer. Then she'd run screaming into the hall.

"Help, help, please help me," she'd cry. "He's killing Midge." How could it miss? They'd catch him and they'd blame him for the murder.

Almost an hour had passed and she found herself at her bedroom window looking out into the alley, waiting for the drunk to return.

And then she saw him and almost laughed out loud at the sight. He was half running, half staggering, the rain pouring down in angry gusts on an empty orange crate he held over his head. The crate he needed to stand on so he could climb through the window.

And then suddenly, fear, real fear clawed at her throat. There was a cop following the drunk. He was right in back of him. And behind the cop was Mr. Tresca, the man who owned the corner fruit stand. Tresca pointed at the drunk. "That's him."

The cop grabbed the drunk. "Where you going with the crate?"

The drunk looked directly at her open window, indecision on his face. She barely heard his reply. "It's raining officer, I need this box to keep my head dry."

The cop smirked, "You're a real fancy guy, gotta have an umbrella when it rains, so you steal a crate; only it's full of oranges and you dump them all over the street. Let's go!"

The cop held the drunk under the arm and walked him out of the alley followed by Mr. Tresca, who carried the empty orange crate.

Rose thought of Midge lying still in the other bedroom and then she thought of Joey and she knew she'd have to run alone.

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